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A close-up, high-contrast portrait of Joyce DiDonato. She has short, blonde hair and is looking directly at the camera with a soft expression. Her right hand is resting against her chin, with her fingers partially hidden in a dark, textured fabric. A large, oval-shaped ring with a light-colored stone is visible on her ring finger. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows on her face and hair.

# JOYCE DIDONATO

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# GRAMOPHONE

## SOUNDS OF AMERICA

*A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada*

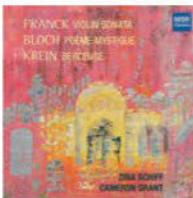
### Bloch · Franck · Krein

Bloch Poème mystique (Violin Sonata No 2)

Franck Violin Sonata Krein Berceuse

Zina Schiff vn Cameron Grant pf

MSR Classics ② MS1508 (59' · DDD)



All of the works that violinist Zina Schiff and pianist Cameron Grant perform on their compelling new disc inhabit realms far above the mundane. The music soars on spiritual flights and journeys through worlds at once zealous, reflective and transcendent. A thread of mysticism connects these scores by Franck, Bloch and the Russian composer Julien Krein (1913-96), whose short *Berceuse* receives its premiere recording.

Krein wrote the piece in Paris in 1928, which accounts not only for the French title but also the Fauré-like radiance that pervades the music. It's a little gem, whetting the appetite for more from a Jewish composer who, like so many others, suffered at the hands of the Soviet regime.

Jewish heritage also suffuses Bloch's *Poème mystique*, a one-movement violin sonata in which the Swiss-born composer evokes a series of haunting scenes enriched by ancient musical forms. The writing abounds in poignant lines and dramatic flourishes for the interweaving instruments.

Franck's Sonata in A major remains a beloved example of 19th-century Romanticism in full bloom; its amalgam of yearning and rapture could easily be taken for granted. Nothing of the sort here. As in the disc's other fare, Schiff and Grant shape every phrase with ardent sensitivity, lingering or propelling the narratives as they heighten the music's ineffable meanings.

Schiff is an exceptional artist, with a shimmering sense of sonority and the ability to find a keen balance between poetry and intensity. With Grant providing his own superb brand of animation, this recording is a meeting of equals. **Donald Rosenberg**

### B Harbach

'Chamber Music, Vol 5'

The Birth, Life and Death of Christ.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MEGAN BURKE

### GRAMOPHONE talks to...

#### enhakē

The ensemble members talk tango

#### Why have you chosen to devote your fourth album to the music of Piazzolla?

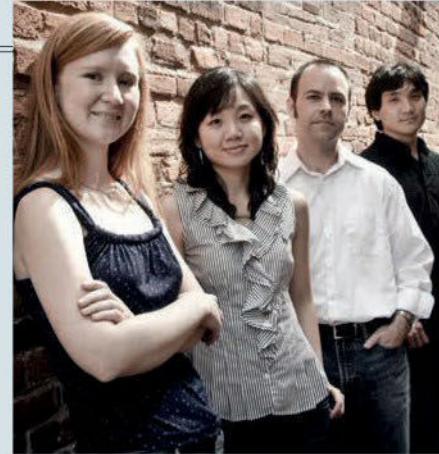
His music has been part of our repertoire nearly as long as we've been together. At first we started to make arrangements simply to diversify our concert offerings. Eventually we began presenting a programme we called 'L'histoire du tango' that featured everything from 'old guard' numbers through (and even past) Piazzolla. When we had enough of his work to populate an entire disc, we set about acquiring funding for the project.

#### Piazzolla's music blurs 'boundaries' between genres and audiences.

That's true – he is on a par with the likes of Gershwin and AR Rahman. It makes sense when you consider Piazzolla's relationships with Ginastera and Boulanger coupled with his love of traditional Argentine tango, American jazz and Jewish musics.

#### Tell us about your arrangements.

Brent [Williams] focused on translating the traditional sounds of tango for our



instrumentation. We all spent time immersed in the sound world of tango to recreate its sense of freshness and freedom in a new way. We were always spontaneous and allowed ourselves to enjoy the music as we created it.

#### What's the ethos behind the group and its approach to repertoire?

Due to our instrumentation, our repertoire tends to be confined to post-Messiaen works. We always seek to develop a keen connection to the music at a personal level, treating it with full reverence, as we would masterworks by Mozart or Beethoven. A genuinely inspired performance of music that is intimately linked to us is what attracts our audience's attention.

Dorothy Parker Love Songs. Nocturne noir. Terezín Children's Songs

Stella Markou, Marlissa Hudson sops

Julia Sakhrova, John McGrosso vns

Alla Voskoboinikova pf St Louis

Chamber Orchestra / James Richards

MSR Classics ② MS1544 (74' · DDD · T)



This fifth volume of Barbara Harbach's chamber music begins with a cycle from Terezín and ends with a silent film score on the life of Christ. These, a short but brilliant pianistic *tour de force* called *Nocturne noir* and a second cycle on bittersweet poems by

Terezín and ends with a silent film score on the life of Christ. These, a short but brilliant pianistic *tour de force* called *Nocturne noir* and a second cycle on bittersweet poems by

Dorothy Parker constitute a rewarding survey of Harbach's recent work.

Harbach responds in her *Terezín Children's Songs* with her most involving music, sung exquisitely by Stella Markou. Four of the songs were written to children's poetry from the concentration camp, and a fifth to Mary Elizabeth Frye's 'Do not stand at my grave and weep', inspired in 1932 by the story of a young Jewish girl unable to visit her dying mother in Germany. Sung exquisitely by Markou, the music is closely, delicately aligned to the five very different poetic voices, particularly attuned to small, special moments like the flutter of doom in Pavel Friedman's 'The Butterfly'.

In Harbach's *Dorothy Parker Love Songs*, Marlissa Hudson relishes the full impact of

# NAXOS AMERICAN CLASSICS SUMMER AND FALL RELEASES 2016



## CORIGLIANO, TORKE & COPLAND: ORCHESTRAL WORKS

8559782 • 636943978221  
Release Date: July 8, 2016

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic  
David Alan Miller

*"Nearly 30 years after its premiere, it [Corigliano's First Symphony] has lost nothing of its power and can be considered as a landmark symphony commemorating whatever rage we feel towards fate and death..."* Remy Franck, *Pizzicato Magazine*



## AARON COPLAND: APPALACHIAN SPRING & HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

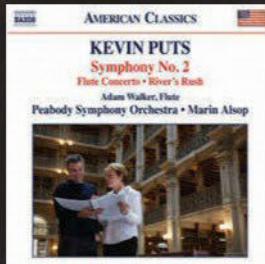
8559806 • 636943980620  
September 9, 2016

Detroit Symphony Orchestra  
Leonard Slatkin

*"Leonard Slatkin has a long history of delivering excellent Copland performances, and this new release is no exception."*  
David Hurwitz, *Classictostoday.com*

## BRUCE ADOLPHE: CHOPIN DREAMS. SEVEN THOUGHTS CONSIDERED AS MUSIC, CHOPIN PUZZLES

Carlo Grante, piano



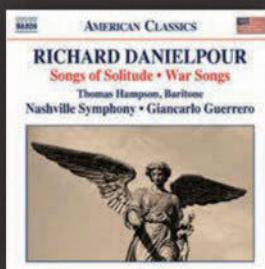
## KEVIN PUTS: SYMPHONY NO. 2, RIVER'S RUSH, FLUTE CONCERTO

8559794 • 636943979426  
August 12, 2016

Peabody Symphony Orchestra  
Marin Alsop, Conductor  
Adam Walker, Flute

*"The Symphony No. 2, River's Rush, and the Flute Concerto reveal Puts as a master of orchestral sonorities and a tone poet of moods, which range from the ecstatic to the elegiac."*

Blair Sanderson, *Allmusic.com*

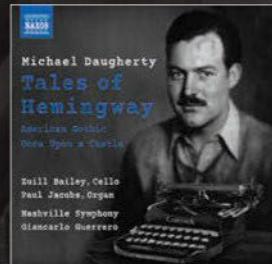


## RICHARD DANIELPOUR: SONGS OF SOLITUDE, WAR SONGS, TOWARD THE SPLENDID CITY

8559792 • 636943979228  
October 14, 2016

Thomas Hampson, baritone  
Nashville Symphony  
Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor

*"Danielpour is wonderfully economical in his orchestration of the accompaniment, and Guerrero gets a beautifully clear and balanced sound from his orchestra. New music is rarely this satisfying to listen to."*  
John Terauds, *Musical Toronto* (*Review of Darkness in the Ancient Valley*)

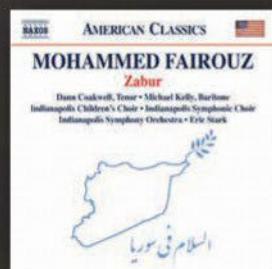


## MICHAEL DAUGHERTY: TALES OF HEMINGWAY, AMERICAN GOTHIC, ONCE UPON A CASTLE

8559798 • 636943979822  
September 9, 2016

Zuill Bailey, Cello • Paul Jacobs, Organ  
Nashville Symphony Orchestra  
Giancarlo Guerrero

*"Giancarlo Guerrero conducts with evident enthusiasm, and as already suggested the soloists, cellist Zuill Bailey and organist Paul Jacobs, couldn't be better. Give this one a shot; you'll be glad you did."*  
David Hurwitz, *Classictostoday* 10/10

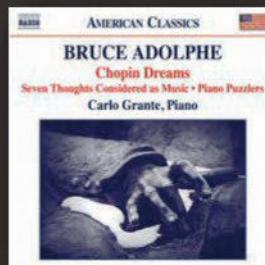


## MOHAMMED FAIROUZ: ZABUR

8559803 • 636943980323  
October 14, 2016

Dan Coakwell • Michael Kelly  
Indianapolis Children's Choir  
Indianapolis Symphonic Choir  
Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra  
Eric Stark

*"Where so many modern composers shy away from straightforward expression, Fairouz embraces it and excels in producing nuanced music that is capable of reaching a wide audience."*  
George Adams, *American Record Guide*



8559805 • 636943980521  
November 11, 2016

*Bruce Adolphe is a composer, author and performer, and is the co-host of NPR's Piano Puzzlers.*



Zina Schiff and Cameron Grant record music by Bloch, Franck and the little-known Julien Krein

these small sagas of love and loss spiked by spiteful kicks at the end; in the case of 'Love Song', with its last line 'And I wish somebody'd shoot him', Hudson's relish is particularly grim.

Harbach's chamber orchestra score for *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ*, French film-maker Alice Guy-Blaché's 1906 classic (available for 'synching' on YouTube), has a meandering, *fin de siècle* feel about it, with imaginative touches throughout, such as the xylophone at the end of the 'Climbing Golgotha' sequence. **Laurence Vittes**

## PS Lewis

'The Four Cycles'

Where the heart is pure<sup>a</sup>. The Changing Light<sup>b</sup>.

Five Love Motets<sup>c</sup>. Three Songs from Ish River<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Christine Abraham *mez* <sup>d</sup>Susan Narucki *sop*

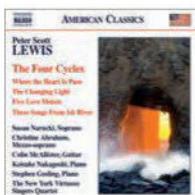
<sup>b</sup>Stephen Gosling, <sup>a</sup>Keisuke Nakagoshi *pf*

<sup>d</sup>Colin McAllister *gtr* <sup>bc</sup>The New York Virtuoso

Singers Quartet / Peter Scott Lewis

Naxos American Classics M 8 559815

(50' • DDD • T)



Peter Scott Lewis has a vivid and idiosyncratic affinity for the human voice, as can be heard on 'The Four Cycles', a disc that spans four decades of creative

activity. The San Francisco-based composer writes in a style that might be termed 'rugged lyricism', with vocal lines and harmonies taking unpredictable directions. A certain sonic pungency invigorates the texts, which are centred on nature and love.

Lewis wrote the verses for *Five Love Motets* (2014) for *a cappella* quartet. The songs are concise and unsentimental, the voices wrapped around the words in ways that suggest the challenges love often presents. Similar in mood is *The Changing Light*, three songs setting texts by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Four voices and piano explore the various hues in close communication.

'Where the heart is pure' originally dates from 1993; Lewis transformed the chamber version into a duo for mezzo-soprano and piano in 2013. Robert Sund's texts reflect aspects of his native state, Washington – the first of the three songs, 'There is no exile where the heart is pure (for Pablo Casals)', opens with a yearning vocalise. The oldest collection, *Three Songs from Ish River* (1976–78), places verses by Sund, Paulé Barton and Theodore Roethke in succinct, intimate contexts for soprano and guitar.

The performers include two vibrant soloists, mezzo-soprano Christine Abraham and soprano Susan Narucki, and the expert New York Virtuoso Singers Quartet conducted by the composer. **Donald Rosenberg**

## Piazzolla

'Prepárense - The Piazzolla Project'  
Revirado. Primavera Porteña. Escualo.  
Oblivion. Libertango. Concierto para  
quinteto. Prepárense. Kicho. Buenos  
Aires hora cero (all arr M Brent Williams)  
**enhakē**

MSR Classics F MS1592 (47' • DDD)



In the process of making the clarinet quartet a viable contemporary music ensemble, enhakē release their fourth CD, a tribute to Ástor Piazzolla. Formed at Florida State University in 2007 and made up of outstanding young musicians from South Korea and the United States, enhakē capture the essential core of Piazzolla's music: to please.

The playing throughout is sublime, operating interpretatively on different, perhaps healthier planes than might be considered authentic, about which anyway Argentines disagree. The intensity is real, the sounds gorgeous, the rhythms infectious. In a chamber music series or at a classical music club, the fans would go wild. Enhakē play as if each track were a universe in itself.

In *Primavera Porteña*, Katharine Decker throws in a devastating solo adorned by



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Berl Senofsky: superlative artistry sampled in his 1958 Brussels World's Fair recital

Eun-Hee Park's fabulous piano riff. In *Escualo*, Piazzolla flaunts his ability to make a virtuoso fiddler dance to his tune in a series of death-defying high-wire escapades. In an extraordinary tango bass concerto called *Kicho*, Decker's cello plays the solo part with uncannily earthy force. And in the midst of all this, enhakē perform *Concierto para quinteto*, Piazzolla's ultimate show-stopper, with elegance, colour and variety. From the opening piano beats, this version strides proudly alongside the legendary recording by Piazzolla himself.

The razor-sharp yet warm recordings were made during a visit to the Durango, Colorado, Chamber Music Series. Violinist M Brent Williams's absorbing booklet-notes constitute an invaluable user's guide to Piazzolla and his music while also laying out a blueprint for enhakē's playing.

Laurence Vittes

## Berl Senofsky

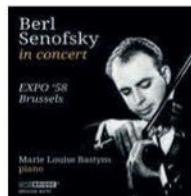
'In Concert at EXPO '58 Brussels'

**JS Bach** Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 - Chaconne **Bartók** Romanian Dances, Sz56 **Brahms** Hungarian Dance No 7. Violin Sonata No 2, Op 100 - 3rd movt, Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante) **Creston** Violin Sonata, Op 19 **Rachmaninov** Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 **Ravel** Pièce en forme de habanera **Wieniawski** Grand duo polonaise, Op 8 **Ysaÿe** Solo Violin Sonata, Op 27 No 6

**Berl Senofsky vn Marie Louise Bastyns pf**

Bridge  BRIDGE9470 (60' • ADD)

Recorded live at the American Theatre, Brussels World's Fair, October 6, 1958



Berl Senofsky seized the attention of the music world in 1955 when he became the first (and, to date, only) American-born violinist to win the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium. The sterling qualities that persuaded the jury to award him first prize are on full display in this 1958 Brussels recital with pianist Marie Louise Bastyns.

The repertoire reveals Senofsky's broad taste, ranging from Bach to Creston, with stops along the way for music at once virtuoso, lyrical or deeply profound. Through it all, Senofsky plays with consummate sensitivity and flair, using his sonorous tone and a discerning palette of vibrato to create something vibrantly expressive. He may have become more well-known if the concert life had offered greater appeal: he spent the better part of his career as a distinguished teacher at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.

The Brussels recital provides a healthy taste of his superlative artistry. He is as

commanding in the penetrating thicket of Bach's Chaconne as he is seductive in Ravel's *Pièce en forme de habanera* and poetic in Rachmaninov's 'Vocalise'. In Wieniawski's *Grand duo polonaise*, Senofsky demonstrates that he can toss off technical feats with the best of them. He fairly kicks up his heels in Bartók's *Romanian Dances* and Brahms's *Hungarian Dance* No 7.

Senofsky, collaborating with the first-rate Bastyns, also proves he's no traditionalist. He brings as much commitment and vitality to Paul Creston's neo-classical Sonata as he does to the programme's more familiar fare.

Donald Rosenberg

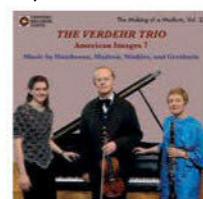
## American Images, Vol 7'

**Gershwin** Promenade (arr Armand Russell)

**Hutcheson** Nocturnes of the Inferno. Rondo brillante **Madsen** Sea Change 2 **Winkler** Warhol appassionata

**The Verdehr Trio** with

**David Renner, Deborah Moriarty** pf  
Crystal Records  CD972 (68' • DDD)



Inspired by a visit to Notre-Dame Cathedral during which the Michigan State University composer 'experienced an apparition in which gargoyles scurried



Sondra Radvanovsky's single-season triumph in Donizetti's "Tudor Queen" trilogy now available: *Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda* (radio broadcasts), and *Roberto Devereux* (Live in HD presentation, pictured, with Matthew Polenzani)



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The TransAtlantic Ensemble: Mariam Adam and Evelyn Ulex travel the western hemisphere

about the entrails of a gigantic, cross-shaped grand piano', Jere Hutcheson's *Nocturnes of the Inferno* sports the sleek, gorgeous energy and occasional dark corners of a graphic novel. It was the second commission awarded by the Verdehr Trio after their formation in 1972, and presented the three instruments as virtuoso, adventurous, equally tasked protagonists; their first commission had been Hutcheson's deliriously infectious *Rondo brillante*, which laid out similar territory in shorter form focused more on sheer pleasure.

While David Winkler's absorbing, morose *Warhol appassionata* was the Verdehr Trio's last commission, inspired by Andy Warhol's Beethoven portraits at a 2012 National Gallery exhibition and studded with Beethovenian hints and gestures, two other works signify different landmarks in the Trio's career. Pamela Madsen's *Sea Change 2* from 2009 was a moving response to Genevieve Taggard's poem about love, loss and transformation, lacing skeins of incandescent beauty with untoward advances. Armand Russell's smooth arrangement of George Gershwin's *Promenade*, the final piece on the disc, was the last piece performed by the trio, as an encore on their final concert March 28, 2015, in León, Mexico, the 58th

country in which the Trio had performed during its 43-year career.

The cover photograph looks as if Grant Wood's *American Gothic* had morphed into the photograph of a violin-clarinet-piano trio. The booklet-notes are generous and useful, and the sound is uniformly fine, perhaps the result of the trio producing their own recordings.

**Laurence Vittes**

### 'Havana Moon'

**Águila Nocturne. Silence. Tango Trio D'Rivera**  
**The Cape Cod Files. Contradanza. Habanera.**  
**Vals Venezolano Jofre Primavera. Sweet Dreams**  
**Villa-Lobos Skyline of New York. Valsa da Dor**  
**TransAtlantic Ensemble with**  
**Liana Gourdjia vn JP Jofre bandoneón**  
**Steinway & Sons ® STNS30052 (62' • DDD)**



Clarinetist Mariam Adam, a founding and former member of Imani Winds, steps out with pianist Evelyn Ulex in their guise as the TransAtlantic Ensemble for a splendid voyage of discovery through the western hemisphere. The coolly virtuoso performances, lit by flashes of passion, reflect the musicians' close identification with the composers.

In fact, Adam has known 'and been inspired' by Paquito D'Rivera, who accounts for half of the music, since she moved to New York from Monterey in 1997. The most substantial is D'Rivera's richly atmospheric *The Cape Cod Files*, written for the 30th anniversary of the Cape Cod Music Festival, with movements dedicated to Benny Goodman, Piazzolla and Ernesto Lecuona. The most charming are three dances including an erotic habanera and an intoxicating *vals venezolano*.

Despite being allowed less than eight minutes, Argentine bandoneónist JP Jofre scores big time with catchy tunes and subtly off-kilter rhythms to make things interesting. His *Sweet Dreams* is indeed a sweet young thing; his *Primavera* is a manic, dance-obsessed encore piece.

Miguel del Águila's *Silence*, which takes both instruments on a series of breathtaking hooks-and-ladders runs, was a commission from Mark Carlson's long-running Pacific Serenades series in Los Angeles, which Adam describes as a 'nostalgic ode to his time living in California – something I relate to as a displaced Cali-girl living in Paris'.

Ulex steps out in solo-piano mood pieces by Villa-Lobos and Áquila, which she livens up with colours that hint at inner flames, sumptuously recorded in Steinway Hall. **Laurence Vittes**

# 2016–17 SEASON



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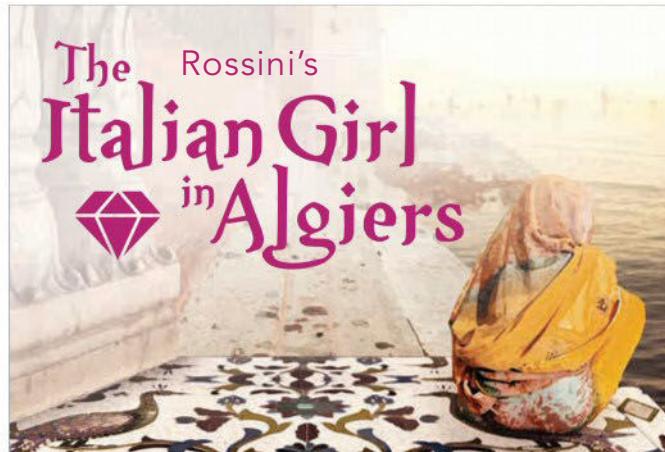
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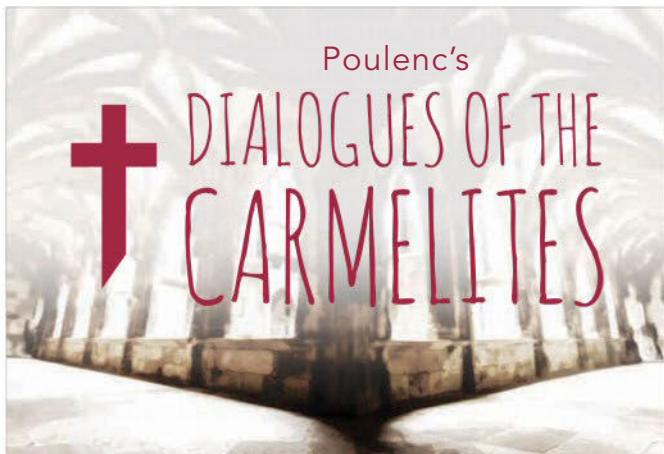
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## The relevance of classical music today

**A** word we hear a lot about today is 'relevance'. Is such-and-such person, or product, or activity or cause, relevant? It seems to be a particularly significant concern among those whose lives or brands are engaged in the ever-shifting and of-the-moment online world of social media. Given that, those of us in the music world might be forgiven for taking the long view, to trust that our art-form will transcend the temporary. Bach's music feels as relevant to me as it was to a Leipzig worshipper three centuries ago, so let us not trouble ourselves with such concerns. Genius will survive.

But to think in this way is to risk complacency, and to miss opportunities. Look at, or listen to, popular culture, talk to today's youth, and it's clear that classical music doesn't have the resonance it might, or should. Resonance, no. But relevance? Tackle the first, and I believe the second will invariably follow.

This month's issue of *Gramophone* offers some good examples. In our cover story interview with Joyce DiDonato, the mezzo talks about her desire to programme her new Baroque disc in such a way as to speak to contemporary concerns about conflict. But it's the passage about her visit to the maximum security prison Sing Sing in New York that is most moving. In a place separated by a chasm from the plush velvet and champagne bars of a city-centre opera house, DiDonato not only found a warm welcome, but more importantly welcoming ears, minds and hearts to the power and passion of the arias she sang. Try telling her, or her audience, that these heady distillations of drama and emotion, forged in an



age and society far removed from our own, don't have a relevance.

Turning to contemporary composition, the belief of Gil Rose, Artistic Director of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, that the music of today deserves both advocacy and a legacy, has, over the last decade, resulted in a catalogue of 50 releases. As we discover in our feature this month, those recordings have been transformative for both composers and audiences.

This weekend I visited Clare College, Cambridge for an article I'm writing for the next issue. In a 250-year-old chapel of a seven-century old college, singing texts written in 1662 based on scripture two millennia old, the music's relevance today felt palpable. The sheer joy in the faces of the new undergraduates as they rehearsed, and became enveloped by, the ending of Dyson's Magnificat in D, was wonderful to see. I've read recent articles citing a growth in attendance at both choral Evensong and cathedral services, where the experience of spirituality, reflection and rootedness offered is finding an increasing relevance in our ever-more hectic and amorphous world. Long may that continue. And earlier at Clare I'd watched an undergraduate sing Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad*, the talented baritone's age adding an additional and moving poignancy to Housman's reflections on the transience of youth and its proximity to death.

Whether in the choir stall, the contemporary concert hall, or an American prison, classical music's relevance to today's world is clearly never in doubt. And it's incumbent on all of us to make sure it's heard.

[martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com](mailto:martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com)

### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Dobbiaco in the snow is a magical place,' recalls our Editor-in-Chief **JAMES JOLLY** who travelled there for our

cover story to 'witness Joyce DiDonato and the dynamic Il Pomo d'Oro recording a programme of Baroque arias with a powerful message for today's worryingly unstable world.'



'It was fascinating to go to Hong Kong to write about the second instalment of the Hong Kong Philharmonic's Ring cycle and to talk to those behind the project,' writes **HUGO SHIRLEY**, adding that 'Jaap van Zweden has turned the orchestra into a Wagner band to be reckoned with.'



'The Boston Modern Orchestra Project is a key component of Boston's musical life,' says **DAVID WEININGER**, Boston Globe columnist and author of our feature this month about the orchestra's in-house label, BMOP/sound. 'Writing about the label allowed me to consider it in a new way.'

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

**Gramophone**, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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A close-up, dramatic portrait of Sir Neville Marriner. He is an elderly man with light-colored hair, wearing a dark tuxedo jacket over a white dress shirt with a white bow tie. The lighting is low, casting deep shadows on the right side of his face, while the left side is more brightly lit, highlighting his forehead, eyes, and the wrinkles around his mouth. The background is a solid, dark blue.

# SIR NEVILLE MARRINER

1924 – 2016



# New releases on Sony Classical



3CD / 889853160327

## Teodor Currentzis & MusicAeterna

### Mozart: Don Giovanni

This release completes the acclaimed Da Ponte opera series from one of today's most exciting conductors.



88985350792

## Sol Gabetta

### Elgar/Martinů – Cello Concertos

Elgar – Concerto in E Minor, Op. 85  
Martinů – Concerto No. 1, H. 196



889853696420

## Sonya Yoncheva & Karine Deshayes

### Pergolesi: Stabat Mater

Two of the most outstanding female vocalists of our day appear in a masterwork of the sacred music repertoire.



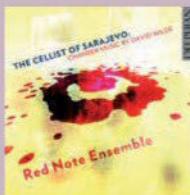
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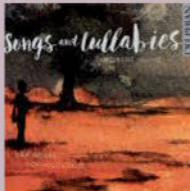


DDC34179

The Cellist of Sarajevo:  
chamber music by David Wilde  
Red Note Ensemble, Robert Irvine cello

David Wilde – extraordinary pianist and musician, pupil of Franz Reizenstein and Nadia Boulanger – is the veteran of nine Delphian piano recordings, documenting his remarkable Indian summer as a performer. Now, the label turns to his compositional output: cellist Robert Irvine and his colleagues in Red Note Ensemble survey the works that emerged from Wilde's 'Bosnian' period, when he travelled to besieged Sarajevo to help preserve the city's cultural life, earning him the friendship of colleagues including the heroic members of the Sarajevo String Quartet.

Wilde has made his home in Scotland since his retirement from teaching in Hanover, and the respect in which he is held by the leading chamber musicians of his adopted country shines through here, in their performances of music which recalls his earlier life in Central Europe and bears witness to a dark period in late twentieth-century history.



DDC34173

Songs and Lullabies: new works for solo cello  
Robert Irvine

Inspired by the plight of disadvantaged and mistreated children around the world, Delphian artist Robert Irvine has commissioned 18 new pieces for solo cello. As a musician who works at the heart of the English and Scottish scenes, he is able to draw on a roster of friends and colleagues that includes some of the UK's leading composers. Includes works by James MacMillan, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Gabriel Jackson, Sally Beamish and Piers Hellawell.

'lovely playing, captured in warm, natural sound. A well-produced document of a very worthwhile project' — Gramophone, October 2016



DDC34183

Dragon Voices: the giant Celtic horns  
of ancient Europe

John Kenny *carnyx*, Loughnashade horn  
& percussion

People of Celtic culture all over ancient Europe were fascinated by lip reed instruments, and made great horns and trumpets in many forms – including the *carnyx*, a two-metre-long bronze trumpet surmounted by a stylised animal head. One of these was found at Deskford, Scotland, in 1816 and reconstructed in the early 1990s; it is joined here by the magnificent Tintignac *carnyx*, discovered in southern France in 2004 and reconstructed specially for the current project. Recent developments in music archaeology have vastly increased our understanding of the physical construction of these instruments and their likely playing techniques. John Kenny is the leading specialist in this field, and his newly created music explores these unique instruments by drawing on Celtic mythical characters, echoes of ancient ritual in modern society, and impressions of real places in Ireland, Scotland and France.

'at some points sounds like a dragon awakening, at others like avant-garde jazz'  
— The New York Times, April 2016

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# GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice

**Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



## JS BACH

French Suites, BWV812-817  
**Murray Perahia** *pf*  
 DG  
 ▶ **HARRIET SMITH'S REVIEW** ON PAGE 26

An artist whose insight and virtuosity always seem so profoundly at the service of the score, Murray Perahia offers a wonderful disc of Bach's French Suites for his first DG disc.



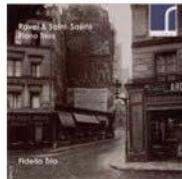
## CPE BACH

Flute Concertos  
**Emmanuel Pahud** *fl*  
 Potsdam Chamber Academy / Trevor Pinnock

Warner Classics

Emmanuel Pahud is a thrilling virtuoso in works that show off the flute's potential as a truly dramatic instrument.

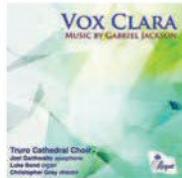
▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 28



## RAVEL. SAINT-SAËNS

Piano Trios  
**Fidelio Trio**  
 Resonus  
 The Fidelio Trio's discography shows them devoted to championing the piano trio across the repertoire, not least in modern music: this disc finds them highly compelling in Ravel and Saint-Saëns.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 53



## JACKSON 'Vox clara'

Truro Cathedral Choir / Christopher Gray / Regent  
 Regent brings us another superb contemporary choral disc, following its recent David Bednall success – this time of the imaginative and engaging music of composer Gabriel Jackson.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 75



## DVD/BLU-RAY

**BERG Wozzeck**  
 Sols incl Gerhaher; Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi

Accentus

'A finely honed production,' writes critic Neil Fisher of this production of *Wozzeck*'s dark drama, featuring Christian Gerhaher in the title-role. Another noteworthy release from the Accentus label.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 86



## MOZART Piano

Concertos, K413-415  
**Kristian Bezuidenhout** *pf*  
 Freiburg Baroque Orchestra  
 Harmonia Mundi

There's much infectious joy in the music-making here from fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout and his Freiburg Baroque colleagues.

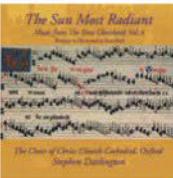
▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 38



## 'LA FAMILLE FORQUERAY'

**Justin Taylor** *hp*  
 Alpha  
 A young harpsichordist and recent competition victor, Justin Taylor reveals himself to already be a boldly individual interpreter with this debut solo disc, and certainly one to watch.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 67



## 'THE SUN MOST RADIANT'

Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Oxford / Stephen Darlington  
 Avie

The latest instalment in Christ Church's exploration of the Eton Choirbook is beautifully prepared and presented, with excellent singing throughout.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 83



## BEETHOVEN. MOZART

Quintets for Piano and Winds  
 Die Freitagsakademie  
 Winter & Winter  
 There's a real focus

on detail and a wonderful sense of character and personality in these period-instrument performances of two delightful works.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 46



## FUX. KERLL Requiems

Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier  
 Ricercar  
 Winning Recording of the Year in

2012 for their Schütz disc rightly drew attention to this superb choir; this, their latest release for Ricercar, is just as skilful and engaging.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 75

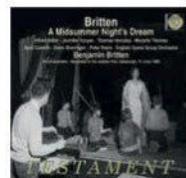


## 'IN WAR & PEACE'

**Joyce DiDonato** *mez*  
 Il Pomo d'Oro / Maxim Emelyanychev  
 Erato

As our cover story explains, Joyce DiDonato is a singer who strives to find a relevance in music for the world around us. This touching and dramatic disc is a perfect part of that.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 94



## REISSUE/ARCHIVE

**BRITTEN** A Midsummer Night's Dream / Benjamin Britten  
 Testament

The premiere of Britten's opera was heard by an audience of just 300 – now you can join them.

▶ **REVIEW** ON PAGE 86



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at [qobuz.com](http://www.qobuz.com)

# FOR THE RECORD



Martyn Brabbins: champion of British music and English National Opera's new Music Director

## Martyn Brabbins named Music Director of English National Opera

English National Opera has announced that Martyn Brabbins will be its new Music Director with immediate effect. Brabbins replaces Mark Wigglesworth, who announced his resignation in March but continued to lead productions until the end of the last season. Brabbins's contract runs until 2020 and he will plan the next two seasons together with Artistic Director Daniel Kramer.

Brabbins was Associate Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra from 1994 to 2005, Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic (2009-15), Chief Conductor of the Nagoya Philharmonic from 2012 to 2016 and Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Festival of Music (2005-7). He is a noted conductor of British music, and won a *Gramophone* Award for his recording of Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus* in 1998.

Brabbins has produced more than 100 recordings for various labels, but particularly for Hyperion and NMC, in repertoire ranging from Stanford, Vaughan Williams and Bax to several composers of today, including Sally Beamish, Judith Weir and Simon Holt.

Of his new appointment, Brabbins said: 'With an orchestra and chorus of such exceptional calibre, and a musical legacy nurtured by the finest British conductors, from Reginald Goodall through to Mark Wigglesworth, I feel incredibly honoured to have been invited to join ENO and to become a part of this treasured British musical company. It is quite an act to follow, and in a tough financial climate, but I am determined that ENO will continue to produce stimulating operatic performances of the highest musical quality at the London Coliseum.'

Brabbins's new recording of Elgar's *Enigma* Variations with the BBC Scottish SO is reviewed on page 32.

## IN THE STUDIO

### Raphael Wallfisch explores the music of exiled Jewish composers

The cellist Raphael Wallfisch is to embark on a series of recordings for CPO devoted to the music of exiled Jewish composers who escaped fascism and the Third Reich in the 1930s and '40s. This is a very personal project for Wallfisch as his mother, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, was a cellist in the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz.

The first recording in the series, which has been made with the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra and conductor Nicholas Milton, includes the cello concertos of Hans Gál and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. The second volume features music by Berthold Goldschmidt, Karl Weigl, Franz Reizenstein, Robert Starer and Ernst Bloch. The first installment will be released next year.

### Barbara Hannigan makes album as both singer and conductor

Barbara Hannigan will make her debut on disc as both soprano and conductor in repertoire including Berg's *Lulu* Suite, Gershwin's *Girl Crazy* Suite and Berio's *Sequenza III* for voice with the Ludwig Orchestra. Winner of this year's *Gramophone* Contemporary Award for her recording of Abrahamsen's *let me tell you*, Hannigan is in great demand as a soprano not just for her formidable technique but also for her commitment to contemporary music. Hannigan also featured on the Contemporary Award winners in 2013 (Dutilleux's *Correspondances*) and 2014 (Benjamin's *Written on Skin*).

As a conductor she has worked with the Gothenburg Symphony, Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the Santa

## BBC's Choral Evensong celebrates 90 years of broadcasts

'The Corporation's support for its 90-year-old enterprise in today's climate feels almost miraculous. To be honest, I don't know where I would be without it.' So wrote Andrew Mellor in a fascinating blog for *Gramophone*'s website paying tribute to the BBC's *Choral Evensong* programme, and we are sure that many of our readers would agree.

The first broadcast of *Choral Evensong* came live from Westminster Abbey on October 7, 1926, and it has been broadcast nearly every week since. There was a three-month pause in the 1970s, which provoked a listener outcry before the programme was reinstated.

Weekly live broadcasts even continued during World War II, though due to security concerns the locations of

the services were never published in advance. Now, in its 90th year, the programme is the longest-running outside broadcast in history and today receives a weekly audience of 250,000 listeners.

The 90th anniversary broadcast came live from Westminster Abbey, as the first programme had done 90 years previously.



Barbara Hannigan: soprano and conductor

Cecilia Academy Orchestra in Rome. The new album, called 'Crazy Girl Crazy', will be released by Alpha in 2017 alongside a documentary film about the album directed by Mathieu Amalric.

### Beatrice Rana records the Goldberg Variations

We've witnessed some outstanding recordings of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* recently, Igor Levit's account (on piano) won *Gramophone's* Recording of the Year Award in September and Mahan Esfahani's version on harpsichord was an Editor's Choice in the October issue. Now Beatrice Rana has recorded the *Goldberg's* for Warner Classics for release in March 2017.

Rana won the silver medal at the 2013 Van Cliburn Competition and joined BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists scheme in 2015. Her first recording for Warner Classics, of Prokofiev's Second and Tchaikovsky's First concertos, was an Editor's Choice in the December 2015 issue.

## Paavo Järvi and Kirill Petrenko commit to their orchestras

Kirill Petrenko was elected by the musicians of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra to be their new Chief Conductor in June 2015, but it wasn't until October 2016 that he actually signed the contract. He will take up the position in August 2019, succeeding Sir Simon Rattle. Petrenko first appeared with the BPO as a guest conductor in 2006 and is currently Music Director of the Bavarian State Opera.

The BPO have also confirmed that their new General Manager from 2017 will be Andrea Zietzschmann, who founded the Mahler Chamber Orchestra together with Claudio Abbado in 1997.

On the other side of the world, last year's *Gramophone* Artist of the Year Paavo Järvi has extended his contract with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo for an additional three years, up to August 2021. Järvi became the orchestra's Chief Conductor in September last year, so this contract extension suggests that a happy relationship with the orchestra has been established very quickly.

The NHK SO recently celebrated its 90th birthday with a performance of Mahler's Symphony No 8 with Järvi at the helm, and in February and March 2017 they will embark on a seven-concert European tour, which will also coincide with a release of orchestral works by Richard Strauss on Sony Classical.

Järvi said: 'I have enjoyed my first season with the NHK SO immensely and am delighted to extend the contract knowing that I will have the opportunity to work with these fine musicians over an extended period of time.'



Paavo Järvi receives Gramophone's 2015 Artist of the Year Award from Editor-in-Chief James Jolly

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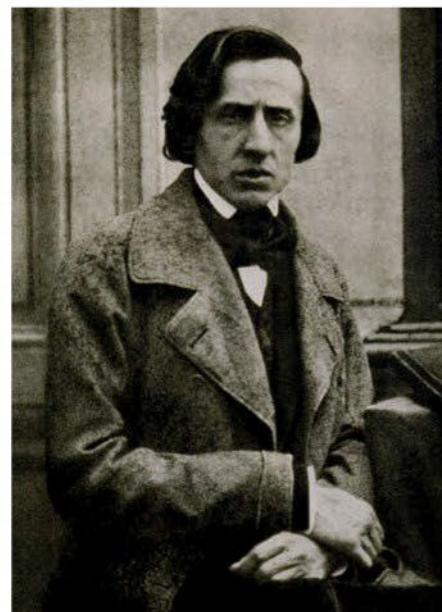
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### PODCASTS

Editor Martin Cullingford talks to violinist Tasmin Little and composer Roxanna Panufnik about their new recording for Chandos, which features Panufnik's *Four World Seasons* alongside Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.

### THE 50 GREATEST CHOPIN RECORDINGS

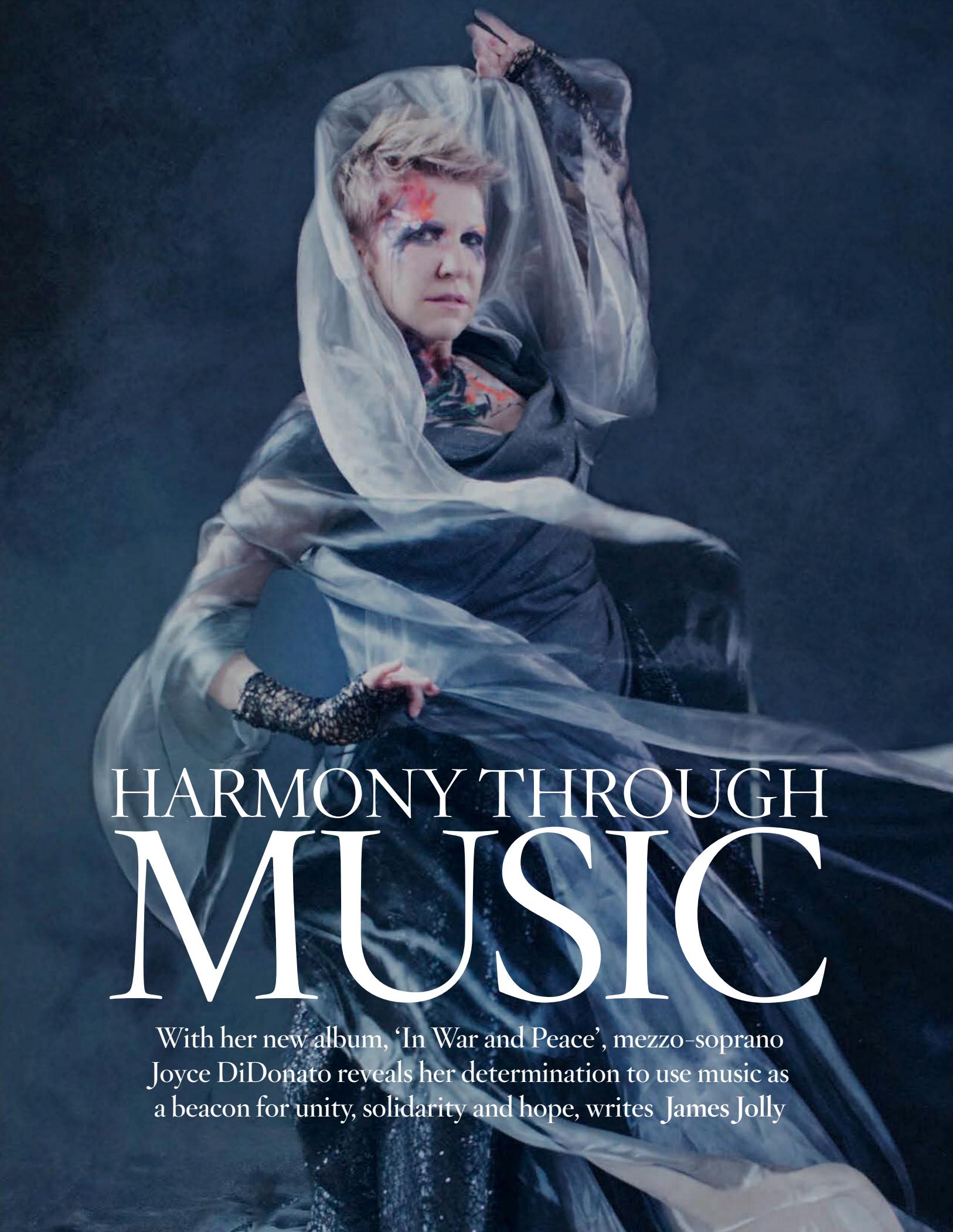
Our lists of the 50 greatest Mozart, Beethoven and Bach recordings have proved phenomenally successful, and so we are proud to present 50 of the finest recordings of Chopin's music. Included are *Gramophone*



Award-winning albums, Recordings of the Month and Editor's Choice discs from Rubinstein, Argerich, Pollini, Perahia, Cortot, Grosvenor, and many more. We have included, where possible, the complete original *Gramophone* reviews, which are drawn from our Reviews Database of more than 45,000 reviews. If you want to hear Chopin performance at its best, this list is the perfect place to start.

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# HARMONY THROUGH MUSIC

With her new album, 'In War and Peace', mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato reveals her determination to use music as a beacon for unity, solidarity and hope, writes James Jolly

he northern Italian town of Dobbiaco is best known to music lovers under its Austrian name, Toblach. It was here in the South Tyrol, for three summers between 1908 and 1910, that Gustav Mahler came to write his Ninth Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde*, and to start his Tenth Symphony. It's hard to imagine how anyone could write such death-obsessed music in a setting as beautiful as this. In the summer the countryside positively seethes with life (just think of the opening of Mahler's First Symphony made real) and in winter, under a thick blanket of spotless snow, there is a purity and beauty that is quite breathtaking. These days, musicians don't come to Dobbiaco to write music; they come to record it.

For a week in March, Joyce DiDonato and Il Pomo d'Oro, under its dynamic and youthful Chief Conductor Maxim Emelyanychev, took up residence in the town to record an album of Baroque arias. The venue was a concert hall – dedicated to the memory of the town's most famous musical visitor – attached to the Grand Hotel Dobbiaco, once an imposing hotel and now a very grand youth hostel; the hall, wood panelled, possesses a warm yet beautifully analytical acoustic that makes it perfect for recording. And, needless to say, Dobbiaco in March is extremely quiet.

**D**iDonato, very much the mezzo of the moment, has reached a point in her career when she can call the shots. Operas are being written for her, film directors are encouraging her to diversify into movies, and recording projects are able to become, *à la* Cecilia Bartoli, ever more a reflection of her position in this world, both as an artist and as a person. She's a singer with a strong social conscience, too. 'I was on track to record unknown compositions from early Naples composers, pre-*bel canto*', she recalls of her newest project. 'It was interesting but it felt a little bit like an academic exercise. Then the Paris attacks happened. So I was sitting there looking at the music – something like 60 arias that had been found – but I couldn't shake the feeling that people were going to listen to the disc just once; they'd say, "OK", but feel no need to return to it. And I thought: I want this album to be the one that people need to replay over and over – I have to say something with this disc.'

Il Pomo d'Oro had long been engaged as her recording partners, but still DiDonato was worried about the concept, mindful too that there were things she was dying to tackle – pieces, such as 'Lascia ch'io pianga', which she feels she's 'earned the right to do. People go, "everybody's recorded that"', DiDonato says, 'but I wanted the chance to sing it and to tour with it. So all of these things were swirling around in my head.'

She continued to leaf through her list of arias and then there was a Damascus moment. 'It just hit me. It was right in front of me: Sesto's arias. The only things these are talking about are war and

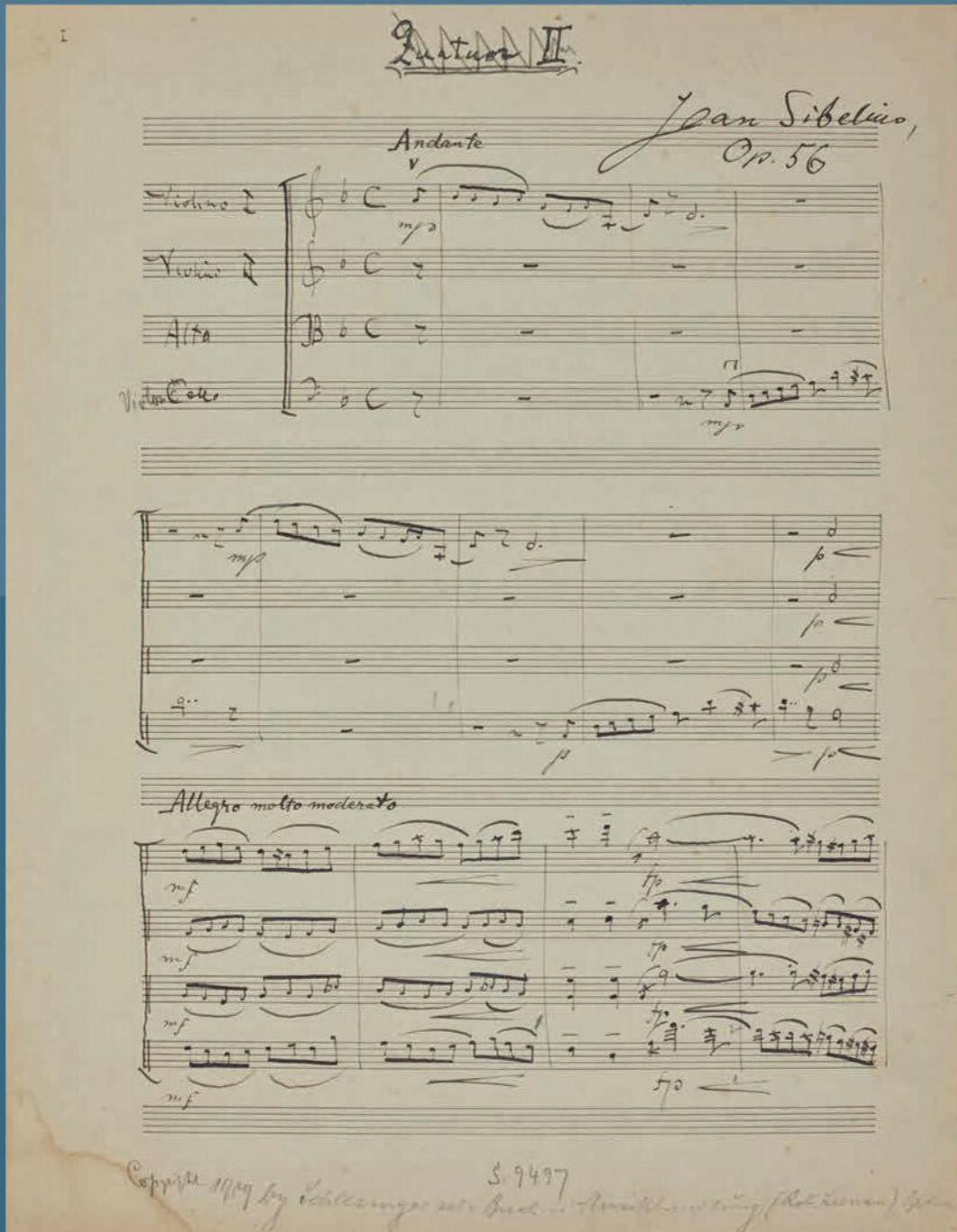
peace and – ding! – it just hit. And I thought: that's it, it's going to be "In War and Peace". Then the repertoire just' – she searches for a suitably strong word – 'vomited out in front of me. I could make four discs...five discs, I thought; I could even just record highlights from *Giulio Cesare* singing the four different characters.'

'But I then also realized that there was something bigger here. Artists, playwrights, composers – we've been talking about this for centuries, since the beginning of our time, in fact. I decided I wanted to put out the message that we have a choice; to say, "here's what war looks like; here's what peace looks like; here are all the murky waters in between – and we have a choice." I don't need to represent reality in this project. We have reality all around us. I want to show the ideal. So that's why I put "Harmony through Music" in the title, because I think it's becoming more true each day. The only things that make sense, the only sane place right now for many people, are the arts and music. It's the one place where we can still be united.'

**I**t's 11 o'clock in Dobbiaco, just over halfway through the week's sessions – it's also St Patrick's Day. Il Pomo d'Oro have been warming up for an hour, trying out various approaches and balances for the aria on the menu for the day, Cleopatra's 'Da tempeste' from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, destined for the 'Peace' half of the programme. DiDonato arrives bang on time, showing signs of the pretty punishing schedule (she'd sung three sessions the previous day), yet full of enthusiasm. I joke that I'd scoured London the day before for shamrocks to bring the diva, née Joyce Flaherty. She laughs and tells me she'd also been looking for something green. Instead she is stylishly dressed all in black, with that kind of effortlessly casual elegance that comes with immense practice.

She joins the orchestra in the hall and immediately wins their hearts. 'Finally we have no violas,' she jokes to the ensemble. 'It's like when we do *Figaro* and have no tenors!' There's laughter, and she launches into an explanation of the aria. 'This is Egyptian girl power. Cleopatra is the original feminist. She ruled a huge kingdom. She's exotic, but sexy in a feminist way. This woman gives life. There's empowerment – keep up boys! – yet it's a real moment of celebration. Oh,' she adds, 'and if you want to take it down a half step, that's fine with me!'

The dynamic between singer and players is easy, casual and clearly fuelled by mutual respect and fondness. DiDonato is also disarmingly honest. When she messes up, she apologises; and when they need a few different takes, she issues a very genuine 'Thanks for your patience, guys!' It's also one of those recording sessions where the entire orchestra piles into the control room to listen to playbacks. Each member is comfortable about chipping in, and it really does feel like a case of DiDonato being first among equals. 'I think I need to be more improvisatory, more celebratory,' she comments at the first playback. 'The orchestra needs to be more grounded in the tempo,' is her longtime producer



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Calm before 'Da tempeste': the recording sessions for 'In War and Peace' taking place at the concert hall in Dobbiaco

Daniel Zalay's comment, while Emelyanychev suggests a more 'frisky and jumpy' approach from the singer. And he proposes that she try a single breath for the final coloratura passage. 'Do you want to show me how to do that?' she comes back at him fast, to general laughter. Later I comment about the orchestra's extreme youth, and DiDonato delights in telling me of an occasion when they were touring in the States and couldn't get into a bar because one of them wasn't 21.

The relationship between Il Pomo d'Oro and DiDonato is one that works not just on a musical level, but on a personal one too. 'They're phenomenal,' she tells me. 'It's like family, they're friends, they're eager, they're not stuck in their ways.' Though a relative newcomer to the musical scene, the ensemble can trace its roots back to Il Complesso Barocco, the late Alan Curtis's group, with which DiDonato made her first recordings. 'We've kind of grown up together artistically and in the world. I think they like feeling empowered and that they are a part of it – that they're necessary in terms of the character and setting the landscape and the drama. They're so willing – and that's unusual for an orchestra in general, I have to say. You feel and hear it in the music that they're actually engaged, that they're invested in the music-making, which is particularly important with an ensemble of that size.'

'Every player may as well be a soloist, as each of them has a really distinct voice. This kind of music, especially this project, is so personal and so deeply human. Every aria is a big journey, and if it's not really clear – the story that we're telling and the journey of that character – with everybody on that stage, it's intolerable for me. But they're such willing partners, and play so beautifully and with such energy. I love it. I feel so fortunate to be with them.'

Il Pomo d'Oro – who take their name from an enormously extravagant 10-hour opera, from 1666, by Antonio Cesti – travel pretty light (even their Artistic Director Giulio d'Alessio plays the violin in the ensemble), but they do have some interesting camp-followers. One of them is the Veneto-based American crime writer Donna Leon, who refers to herself as the ensemble's 'mascot'. And she and DiDonato go back a long way, too. 'She was recording duets with Patrizia Ciofi, Il Complesso and Alan Curtis,' the writer recalls of the first encounter, some 15 years ago, 'and I

remember thinking: "Wow, this kid can sing". I immediately liked her because she was a real person. There was no glam – fake or real or attempted. She is a serious singer. And we'd often end up after recording

sessions at one end of the dinner table with Alan because we were the English speakers and everyone else was speaking other languages. My admiration for her grew as her musicality blossomed and she got better and better with each passing year.'

And has she changed in those 15 years? 'Not at all. There's a confidence, but the centre – a middle-class American young woman who comes from a very united family and who was raised good – has not changed at all. She was absolutely unpretentious, un-diva-like. But now she *is* a diva, there's really no difference.'

The writer is also struck by the relationship between DiDonato and Il Pomo d'Oro, a mutual respect that I witnessed during the sessions. 'There's a kind of a basic equality among these musicians that I notice and like. Often a player will do something and Joyce will say, "Yes! That's great". People aren't intimidated to say "Could we try such and such?". There's a lot of back and forth and it's lovely to see.'





'The most extraordinary experience I've ever had in my life': DiDonato performs for prisoners in New York's Sing Sing Correctional Facility

**J**ump forward three months, and DiDonato and I are in London. She's in town singing her first staged *Werther* at Covent Garden ('I don't get that kind of orchestral texture very often in the repertoire that I do – it's like bathing in it'). We take the opportunity to reflect further on 'In War and Peace' – on the project itself but also on how it fits into the context of our increasingly dysfunctional world (just a few days earlier the UK had voted to leave the EU).

DiDonato has strong views and, buoyed up by the support she receives from her fans, feels empowered to express them. 'I think the timing is right to dare to actually challenge people and make a big statement like this. It could very well backfire. I could go too far, so I keep coming back to the idea of the music and that I'm not preaching – I'm just presenting, I'm showing an option. This is what I'm thinking.' DiDonato is no stranger to the power of social media, but explains that her online presence was 'completely improvised'. She was reluctant at first: 'It started very innocently when a friend told me I should start a website. I said I didn't want one. "Oh, but you have to have one, people are Googling you." "OK, but I don't want it to be just 'me, me, me'. I want to say something with it." And that evolved into blogs, and that evolved into videos, and that evolved into tweeting. But the whole purpose to me is that I want to connect. It's not just about selling CDs or getting more followers or anything like that. But when I say I'm dedicating a show to a kid who was killed in Santa Fe or committed suicide because he was gay, and I tweet about it, then all of a sudden I see the impact that has on people and how it really touches them, really impacts their lives.'

**S**ing Sing is a maximum security prison about 30 miles north of New York City on the east bank of the Hudson river. It is home to about 2000 prisoners, ranging in

age from 18 to 80, and predominantly African-American and Latino. It is not the sort of place you'd expect to find a singer more comfortable on the stage of the Met or Covent Garden – *Fidelio* or *Andrea Chénier* are the closest most opera singers get to a prison. But late last year it provided DiDonato with what she describes as 'the most extraordinary experience I've ever had in my life'.

Carnegie Hall operates an outreach programme that takes musicians into Sing Sing where they work with the prisoners on composition and performance. DiDonato takes up the story. 'I heard about it and I said I wanted to go. They asked the gentlemen there, "Does anyone want to write for an opera singer?" and three of them wrote pieces for me. I went one day to work on the music and to meet the men. A week later they gave a concert for the prison

population – there were about 400 of them in this auditorium. I walked out on stage and I was scared; I could hear my heart beating and I had this very awkward second when I didn't know what to say. My throat went dry. Then from the back of the auditorium this booming voice came out: "thank you for coming here!" And they all started applauding. It was the most heartfelt, warm welcome I will probably ever receive – and they were chanting my name, "di-do-na-to". They couldn't get enough, and at the end they all wanted me to sign their programmes for their girlfriends, for their daughters. They loved it, and they got it. So anybody who has the nerve to say to me that opera is out-dated or irrelevant, I'll flip them the finger and say, "You don't know what you're talking about" because I've seen it!

'We sang the pieces that they wrote, then they wanted me to sing opera. They'd never had an opera singer in there before, so I brought "Piangerò" and "Tanti affetti" and explained them. She recalls what she said: 'In "Piangerò" it's Cleopatra, and she's very upset and in mourning. But in the middle section

you'll hear the music really changes as she starts to reclaim the sense of being a queen, and she says: "when I'm dead I'm going to come back as a ghost and I'm going to haunt you and I'll have my revenge." And then you'll hear the music return and you hear the depth of her sadness.'

But something unexpected happened when she started singing that middle section. 'They started screaming: "You go girl, you get him, you go, make him pay!" They were interacting – it was like what the Globe Theatre must have been like. And then total silence when I come back to the *da capo*...total silence. And then they leapt to their feet and screamed like I've never heard before in my life.'

**S**o 'In War and Peace' isn't just a recording for DiDonato; it's a statement of belief at a particularly traumatic time in world history. There's also a website that explores responses to the question, 'In the midst of chaos, how do you find peace?' DiDonato has canvassed answers from people from all walks of life. 'I have US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg answering the question very eloquently and I have an inmate from Sing Sing answering it in a brutal, brutal, graphic way. Side by side. There is no tier, there is no hierarchy. Everybody has equal say, everybody has equal voice.'

*'Can we frame the concert so that somebody who's 25 is actually attracted to buy a ticket, comes in and is blown away.'*

The recording and the website will be followed by a 20-city tour, which starts in November and runs for 11 concerts and then starts up again next May for another nine – and DiDonato hopes for more after that. When she launched her album 'Stella di Napoli' she gave a concert in a welding factory in Brooklyn. 'We live-streamed it,' she recalls, 'and the best thing was they had an open bar. There were beer bottles clinking on the cement floor and I wore sequined Vivienne Westwood. It was such a juxtaposition of worlds. It was a totally different audience, and I spoke to them. I introduced things casually and they loved it.'

The tour of 'In War and Peace' will, DiDonato explains, attempt to present the aria recital differently. 'My hope is that maybe people will start to think of the classical concert genre in a slightly more open way and ask, "Can we play with this a little bit?". Not play with the music – that's the core of it, the spinal column – but ask whether we can frame it so that somebody who's 25 is actually attracted to buy a ticket, comes in and is blown away. But also so that somebody who's 80, and a subscriber, can say, "Wow, I didn't know that the concert could go to this level". I'm trying to find a way that offers a deeper experience for everybody.'

'That's an issue that I see with classical concerts now. It's not that the content is out of date or, for lack of a better word, "non-relevant" – that couldn't be further from the truth. I just want to deepen the experience. We understand a visual language, to take an example, so if you take down the house lights and you give surtitles it helps you focus on the stage. I could be wrong, but I know that when I go to concerts and there's that effort made I go to a deeper place, I'm carried away.'

*The 'In War and Peace' tour begins in Brussels on November 17. You can join in Joyce DiDonato's global online debate 'In the midst of chaos, how do you find peace?' using the hashtag #talkpeace*

► Read our review of 'In War and Peace' on page 94

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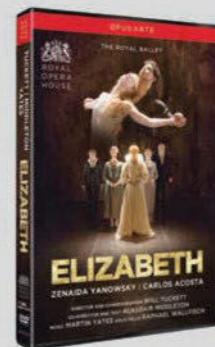
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# A RING FROM HONG KONG TO TAKE ON THE WORLD

Raised eyebrows initially greeted Naxos's Ring cycle, but Jaap van Zweden's Hong Kong forces have proved their mettle with *Das Rheingold* and now *Die Walküre*, writes Hugo Shirley

Just over a year ago, I wrote in these pages about a heartening new development in the story of opera on record: a lavish studio recording of *Aida* being made by Warner Classics. That went on to win a *Gramophone* Award and suggested a return to a lost world of star-studded studio recordings of large-scale opera. But if that *Aida* rightly garnered the headlines, there's another project underway that is perhaps just as worthy of attention: a minor revolution, perhaps, to complement the possible revival hinted at by Warner's *Aida*.

Given that it was Wagner's *Ring* and Georg Solti's famous Decca recording of it that might be seen as the starting point of opera recording at its most ambitious, it is apt that this project also involves Wagner's grand tetralogy. But what also makes this project remarkable is the fact that the label is Naxos –

although its founder, Klaus Heymann, has never been one to shy away from a challenge.

Naxos's opera catalogue shouldn't be underestimated, and already includes a *Ring* cycle, the release of a live recording from Stuttgart. This is very different, however, as Heymann tells me when we meet the day after the first of the two concert performances of *Die Walküre* that form the basis for the new recording of the 'first day' of the cycle (Naxos's recording of the *Das Rheingold* was released a year ago, and the same pattern of recording early in the year and releasing in the autumn is planned for the subsequent instalments). The venue is the Hong Kong Cultural Concert Hall on the waterfront of Kowloon, just along from where you can catch the famous Star Ferry, one of the few relics of old Empire days that has

survived the wave of modernisation that's swept over the former principality, over to Hong Kong Island.

Heymann talks with well-earned confidence – there's hardly an industry storm that this canny operator hasn't successfully weathered – and makes it clear how close to his heart, and to his adopted home of 40 years, this project is. Yet he admits that he was initially sceptical.

It was the brainchild of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra's recently installed conductor Jaap van Zweden, who, having performed the rest of the Wagner canon in his role as chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra (with which he recorded a well received *Parsifal* with Challenge Classics) was determined to do a *Ring* cycle. He was determined, too, to do it with Matthias Goerne – associated more often with Lieder than with the heavier end of the Germanic operatic spectrum – as Wotan.

'They came to me, as we're the local record company of the orchestra, and asked what I thought,' Heymann explains. 'I said, "It's crazy! Who do you think is going to buy it?" And then, you know, they were discussing casts: Goerne is a selling point; the orchestra can probably play it,' he adds with a touch of characteristically laconic understatement. When the rest of the cast started to take shape, so the viability of the project also seemed to grow in Heymann's eyes, with the luxurious conditions for the recording also playing a role. For the *Rheingold* there was a dress rehearsal, two performances and two patch sessions. For *Die Walküre*, it's the same

pair of performances plus dress rehearsal, as well as a generous six patch sessions: 'These are, in a way, ideal conditions that you just don't have nowadays,' he says.

And Heymann is confident in his cast, too – with good reason. Besides the eye-catching inclusion of Goerne, there is Stuart Skelton's Siegmund, arguably the finest before the public today, as well as a clutch of other experienced Wagnerians: Falk Struckmann, himself a fine Wotan earlier in his career, is Hunding; Petra Lang is Brünnhilde and Michelle DeYoung Fricka; Heidi Melton, English National Opera's recent Isolde opposite Skelton's Tristan, is Sieglinde. There is a top-notch clutch of international Valkyries, too. 'It's difficult to find a cast like that even in a major opera house today,' Heymann says. 'Stuart is fantastic as Siegmund; Matthias Goerne – the diction, the expression! How they all sing in tune!' He cites, as the icing on the cake, the fact that his wife, the violinist



Clear-sighted Wagnerian: Jaap van Zweden has finessed the Hong Kong Phil's string sound

Takako Nishizaki, approves: 'She was sitting next to me at the concert last night,' he recalls, 'and she can be very fussy about singer intonation and vibrato!'

Much of his confidence in the second instalment of the cycle comes from the reception of the *Rheingold*. 'Jaap was actually not quite so sure that he wanted to have it released on record. It was a risky thing, and we would get compared with all the great Wagner conductors. And it's a Hong Kong orchestra. I expected people to say, "A Ring from Hong Kong? Brwar!"' – he accompanies his exclamation with a gesture of dismissiveness. 'But we had only one bad review in Luxembourg; everything else was extremely positive.'

There has also been a subsequent boost, which not even Heymann could

have had predicted: the extra interest in the project that has been generated from Van Zweden being appointed to the helm of the New York Philharmonic. And the two singers I speak to, Skelton and Goerne, have nothing but praise for the Dutch maestro, whose work not just as an orchestral trainer but also as a clear-sighted Wagnerian shines through at the performance, the second of the two, that I attend – as do the benefits for cast and players of a long two-week rehearsal period.

'This is a normal sort of rehearsal period you need for an opera like this – but for a *staged* version,' Goerne tells me. Here, he says, it was 'just with the focus on the music.' He's full of praise, too, for the orchestra: 'We should not forget that we're 5000 km away from the places where Wagner is usually played.

It's the first time for them, and the result, I think, is astonishing – the orchestra! The ease!'

As we talk, the baritone is keen to brush away the suggestion that Wotan might be seen as a departure for him, although he admits, as is his normal practice, that he didn't consider the role until he got a firm offer from Van Zweden to be involved: 'He asked me, and I said, "I think I can do this." You sing just Wotan's Farewell in a concert, that is not so difficult. It becomes more difficult when you have to sing for these two hours before it!'

A pragmatic approach to the nuts and bolts of the singing is matched by a clear fascination with the role, as well as some firmly held views on what Wagner singing can and should be. It's no surprise that Goerne should advocate a joined-up way of thinking concerning not just the notes but also the way they and the words fit together. 'This scene with Brünnhilde



A clutch of international Valkyries complete the starry line-up of soloists, which includes Matthias Goerne and Stuart Skelton

is so interesting,' he explains, referring to Act 3's extended negotiation and farewell between Wotan and his daughter, 'and he becomes very ironic. This sort of *Ironie*' – Goerne pronounces the word with its rich German intonation – 'and sarcasm, what's inside, this is so difficult to project. It looks so easy but has to be so lyrical; *this* is so difficult to do.'

'The words and the meaning are so compressed and complex,' he continues. 'Wagner's also using a very strange kind of German. But it's a masterpiece.' Goerne has very clear views about how this German should be communicated, about how many, he feels, overemphasise it. 'The articulation of the words is overdone,' he says, spitting out a random selection of consonants to underline his point. 'The consonants get louder than the vowel before, then you might have in the *diminuendo* a very strong "T", which sits as this kind of mark at the end, so that everything that comes before it is a little bit useless. There's not enough *piano*; there's not enough lyrical sound; there aren't enough differences – and the differences are what

and even when they play loud, it's not aggressive.' He refers to van Zweden's enormous knowledge as an orchestral musician – the conductor spent two decades, from the age of 18, as leader of the Concertgebouw Orchestra – as paying dividends in the Hong Kong Philharmonic's string section in particular: 'They have a rich sound, which gives the impression of being very dramatic, but it's still *mezzo-forte* sometimes – amazing!'

Goerne comes across as relaxed, but that's nothing compared with the easy-going confidence Skelton conveys when I meet him. It's January and the tenor still has his first Tristans to look forward to later in the year, in Baden-Baden and New York, as well as at English National Opera in London. But he's clearly relishing revisiting a favourite role in Siegmund, one that he has recorded three times already, albeit in live recordings from staged productions. 'It's an absolute gift of a role,' he tells me, 'and he's been very kind to me over a long period of time.' It's certainly kind to him in the performance I attend, too, where he sings it with a thrilling heroism and confidence.

In our conversation, Skelton can't conceal his enthusiasm for the project. 'I love this orchestra: such an incredibly talented group. And Jaap has an amazing set of ears for the details of the score. I know most of the people in the cast – in this repertoire you tend to work with the same people – and it's been a barrel of laughs. I love it! It's terrific to be playing with a young orchestra, an orchestra that doesn't get to play this repertoire very often, and to see them embrace it so enthusiastically.'

When I meet van Zweden himself, he exudes much of the same controlled energy that comes across in his precise, disciplined platform



The Hong Kong Cultural Centre's Concert Hall: the 'dry' acoustic has been given warmth by engineer Phil Rowlands

makes it clear that we're talking about something that's human.'

I ask if he sees his own approach as anything new, but he views it in fact as being rooted in a long tradition of a more lyrical approach to this music. 'We had Ferdinand Frantz,' he says, referring to the Wotan on Furtwängler's famous 1954 Vienna recording of *Die Walküre*. Listening to that recording, one can hear exactly what he means.

However, it's an approach that is only really possible with a sympathetic orchestra and conductor, as Goerne makes clear. 'What's astonishing here is that the orchestra is never too loud,

manner. He's reluctant to be drawn into the specific details of how he has managed to train his players to tackle Wagner with an ease that would be the envy of many an opera house orchestra – or maybe he just knows it's a process that's difficult to put into words. But the extent to which he believes in his players is clear. 'People would expect any orchestra, but not a Hong Kong orchestra, to do this well, to pull this off. But this orchestra has so much talent, and is such a force by itself already that I knew they'd be strong enough.'

His earlier experience in having to familiarise the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, an orchestra similarly used to playing just the symphonic repertoire, with Wagner must have come in handy, I suggest. But van Zweden simply emphasises the two orchestras' shared enthusiasm. 'The eagerness is the same,' he says, while also bluntly noting one major advantage his Dutch players had: the Concertgebouw hall itself. 'Although this hall's really good, it's not the Concertgebouw, let's be honest!' He describes the Hong Kong Cultural Centre's Concert Hall, a rough contemporary of Birmingham's Symphony Hall (with which it perhaps bears a passing visual if not sonic resemblance), as 'perhaps a little direct and dry'. But he talked to the series' producer and engineer Phil Rowlands – who is admiringly invoked by all the people I speak to – in order to achieve the sound he wanted. 'I told him that I would like to have just a little bit more space in the sound than that which we hear on stage. That cost us a little bit of time in the beginning, but now I think he's happy with what he hears back.'

*'It's terrific to perform with a young orchestra who don't often get to play this repertoire, and to see them embrace it so enthusiastically'* – Stuart Skelton, Siegmund

Van Zweden doesn't underplay his experience working as the Concertgebouw's leader, but is clear about his own approach – one that shows what a good match for Goerne's Wotan, in particular, this conductor is. 'The thing is, the key point, I would say, is to get inspired by the singers. Because after all these years, I think the voice is the instrument of music-making. When you hear Stuart or the other singers open up, you get inspired by them. I told the orchestra that we need to get in with these voices, to try and have this communication with these voices – especially in the strings.'

More broadly the whole project fits in with van Zweden's plan to claim a strong position on the global musical map for his Hong Kong band. When we speak, he's just finished conducting a Beethoven cycle with them, and Bruckner and Mahler cycles are major parts of their forthcoming plans. 'This is an orchestra that is very young, only 41 years old,' he tells me, 'and I told them that if they really want to make history for themselves, they need to pick up the big pieces.'

Time will tell whether the Hong Kong Philharmonic does make history with its *Ring* – the cast announced for *Siegfried* in January already has some additional eye-catching elements that include Simon O'Neill in the title-role and Melton graduating to Brünnhilde. But few will argue that there are any bigger pieces out there with which these musicians can prove themselves to the world, or that there is any record company better placed to help them than Naxos. 

► Read our review of *Die Walküre* on page 93



# WAGNER DIE WALKÜRE

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# *Preserving the sound of* AMERICAN MUSIC

With a 50th recording now released on its own label, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project is as committed as ever to championing contemporary American composers, writes David Weininger



**S**uffice to say, it was not an especially good omen. It was 2006 and Gil Rose, founder and artistic director of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project – America's only orchestra dedicated exclusively to commissioning, performing and recording 20th- and 21st-century music – was meeting with a foundation that was considering his grant request for funding to start an in-house label for the orchestra; the focus would be largely on American symphonic music. BMOP had already made recordings for other labels, including Naxos, New World and Albany, and on more than one occasion they'd had to secure the funding, record and edit the music, and produce the cover image and booklet themselves – all to create a master recording that someone else would own.

‘At a certain point, I thought, “What the hell am I doing?”’ says Rose. ‘All I needed was a UPC code and a manufacturer. That wouldn’t be hard to find.’

The news that day was not auspicious, though. Tower Records, the record store mega-chain, had announced that it was filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. ‘And I walked into the meeting, and the person held up the paper with the headline,’ the conductor remembers. ‘And he said, “Why would we fund this, in this dying industry?”’

But Rose is not a man easily deterred. Indeed, the idea of assembling and maintaining an orchestra dedicated almost exclusively to new music without standing governmental or institutional support seems almost naive in its idealism, yet Rose has sustained it for two decades.

So it has been with BMOP/sound, the label that the orchestra launched in 2008 amid widespread upheaval in the recording industry. And, as with the ensemble itself, the label has not only survived but blossomed into an integral part of the landscape of recorded music. It has garnered six Grammy nominations and a host of critical plaudits. In November it will release the 50th in its line of composer-centric CDs – a collection of orchestral works by the late Steven Stucky.

Surprisingly, Rose says that the label hasn’t been an added burden on BMOP’s fight to survive. Quite the opposite, in fact: ‘I think if we had not established the label we would probably not be around today. The idea of advocating and documenting and preserving important music that would otherwise go unpreserved and undocumented has helped [BMOP] raise money. And, very importantly, it’s increased our ability to raise money outside of Boston.’

That, in a nutshell, is the goal of BMOP/sound: documentation. The label’s success was never going to be measured by retail sales, although Rose hopes that they will continue to improve over its lifespan. ‘It’s always been about having a core of people – whether they be philanthropists or composers or supporters of composers – who understood the importance of the archival, preservationist aspect.

‘My goal with the orchestra, and by extension with the label, has been to give a broad picture of American music in the past 100 years, of all stylistic tastes,’ he continues. Indeed, few groups can match BMOP for catholicity of taste. ‘It’s where we tackle everything from Milton Babbitt to Mason Bates,’ Rose says – and those composers are, respectively, the 34th and 45th entries in the BMOP/sound catalogue.

The label doesn’t match BMOP’s concert repertoire exactly, however. In deciding what to record, Rose thinks about three different categories of American music: lost masterpieces; works by senior, established composers that have yet to see the light of day; and music by young composers. While the last category gets the most attention, some of Rose’s favourite releases are

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in the first two. Among his proudest achievements is a two-CD set, released last year, of the complete symphonies of Lukas Foss, whose stylistic bearings ranged across his career from neo-classicism to serialism. None of the four symphonies had ever been recorded.

He feels similarly about a collection devoted to Irving Fine and a forthcoming one of works by Leon Kirchner. 'Those mid-century guys have been put on the back burner,' he says. 'That stuff has no champion. And, conveniently, it's always been what's interested me.'

Two works by living composers slated for future release are David Del Tredici's expansively tonal *Child Alice* (1981) and Wayne Peterson's brashly energetic *The Face of the Night, the Heart of the Dark* (1991). Each won the Pulitzer Prize for Music. But *Child Alice* had not been played in its complete form since its premiere until BMOP performed it earlier this year. And Peterson's piece was never played again after its debut performances.

Correcting these kinds of historical and artistic injustices is a motivator for Rose, and he wants to do it while the composers are alive. The fact that Del Tredici is 79 and Peterson 89 does 'light a fire under' him, he says, to get their work released sooner rather than later. 'I really want to make sure that they see their magnum opus.'

The distinguished American composer John Harbison is one of many full of praise for Rose's work: 'One of the things that's always amazed me about Gil is the broad sympathy he has for a lot of different kinds of music, and the no-fuss ability to pull it all together.' Harbison's *Ulysses* was BMOP/sound's inaugural release and the first recording of the 80-minute ballet score. He is the only composer with three releases on the label.

Another reclamation was Harbison's first opera, *Winter's Tale*, from the early 1970s, which BMOP recorded after Harbison did some revisions. 'It's a very difficult piece,' the composer says, 'the kind of thing that, really, a project like this exists for, where you need an orchestra that good, and you need a conductor not daunted by a lot of difficulties. More than just a piece, it was like a whole early part of a decade that came back to me.'

One of the keys to the label's success, Harbison points out, is 'how good a "personnel" person Gil is. He's collected an orchestra at the highest level of quality. That's what he's selling, in a way. It's the pieces, but it's also the quality of the orchestra.' He also has high words of praise for Joel Gordon,



Rose with Steven Stucky; the late composer's music is the focus of BMOP's 50th release

the engineer at most of BMOP's recording sessions. Gordon and Rose spend 'hours and hours on most of their projects, trying to get the right result,' Harbison explains. 'Because those [recordings] are not run on deluxe stages. You don't have the luxury coverage that, say, Leonard Bernstein had for *West Side Story*.'

As for works by young composers, there's no better example of the impact of BMOP/sound than Andrew Norman's *Play*, which the orchestra commissioned and premiered in May 2013. Shortly after the recording was released the following year, musicologist and critic William Robin wondered on Twitter whether it was the greatest orchestral work the 21st century had yet produced. There ensued a debate that brought attention not just to Norman's piece but to a host of other recent orchestral works.

The point, though, is that 'if we hadn't recorded it, no one would have known,' says Rose. 'Because I can tell you, there weren't a lot of people in the audience that night.'

Norman agrees. 'I don't think I can overestimate the value of that recording and what it has done for me, and what being on the BMOP label has done,' he says

during an interview from Los Angeles. 'As with so many pieces of new orchestral music, it's entirely likely that [without BMOP's support] it would have just died on the vine, so to speak.'

It's common, Norman explains, for composers to put performances of solo and chamber works up on YouTube or elsewhere on the internet. Symphonic music is different, though, because of the regulations that govern how an orchestra's work can be disseminated. 'So it's difficult for orchestral composers to get their work out there. I think that just goes to show the extraordinary value of BMOP/sound and what it's doing for the community, because this work wouldn't exist, this repertoire wouldn't exist, without a record of it.'

As for the label's future, Rose doesn't foresee any drastic changes to a game plan that's already proved successful. He sees his ensemble continuing to introduce new material from younger composers and resurrect obscure works undeserving of their neglect. Indeed,

the list of projects for which recording is either underway or complete translates into releases that stretch well into the future.

'I don't see a giant growth curve,' Rose says. 'I just see the next releases in front of me.' **G**

► Read our review of BMOP's recording of George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* on page 28



Recording Anthony Paul De Ritis's 'Devolution' with DJ Spooky (aka Paul D Miller) in 2012



# SIR NEVILLE MARRINER

*Born April 15, 1924; died October 2, 2016*

James Jolly fondly remembers one of the most prolific recording artists of all time

**B**ack in *Gramophone*'s June 1983 issue, Edward Greenfield welcomed a new Philips recording of Beethoven's *Eroica* from the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and Sir Neville Marriner with palpable enthusiasm: 'Even in a very long list, Marriner's version is quite literally... incomparable.' I, a passionate *Gramophone*-reading student, recall thinking 'Eroica? Marriner? Really?' (This was still four years before Roger Norrington's ear-opening cycle.) Catching up with the LP a few weeks later, and listening again to it yesterday, the answer is indeed 'Yes!' – it fairly crackles with

excitement and in many ways prefigured what was to come from a new generation of historically aware, though not period-instrument, conductors. Since Sir Neville's death, I've been playing many of his recordings – his Rossini *Barbiere di Siviglia*, a handful of the Mozart piano concertos with Alfred Brendel, his Richard Strauss *Metamorphosen* and Wagner *Siegfried Idyll*, a disc of Americana including music by Creston, Barber and Ives, and the Finzi Clarinet Concerto, recorded with his son Andrew as soloist. What links them all? Crisp ensemble, bite, a wonderful dynamism, rhythmic

vibrancy, a surprising dramatic intensity, style and complete technical security.

As a young violinist, Marriner played under the batons of both Arturo Toscanini and Wilhelm Furtwängler. He was on the scene at a time when, thanks to the arrival in London of conductors like Herbert von Karajan (Philharmonia) and Josef Krips (London Symphony Orchestra), the standard of orchestral playing was raised immensely. Marriner was subsequently to become one of the most prolific classical recording artists of all time, and the conductor of choice for numerous concerto debut recordings. Yet, it is all too easy to underestimate the influence he had on the world of classical music during his long life.

When the story of the 'period-performance' movement is told, too often the narrative leaps from the work of traditional 20th-century symphony orchestras to the emergent historically informed ensembles who 'rescued' the Baroque and Classical repertoire, taking it back to an approach that its composers might have recognised. But a vital link between these two very different worlds was the work of the chamber orchestra, and Marriner's Academy of St Martin in the Fields is one of the most central.

Whereas many groups were founded as a reaction against a particular interpretative stance, Marriner's ASMF came about first as a rejoinder to the power of the maestro, which prompted a desire for a more democratic approach to making music, and second, by an interest in a repertoire that was largely ignored at the time. When a group of LSO string players gathered in Marriner's Kensington house in 1958, their simple aim was to make music together, Marriner leading from the first violin. That 'coming together' started something that would become one of the most recorded and admired ensembles in the world, an ensemble very much connected to the resurgent, post-war record industry, and full of London's finest players. 'And so after rehearsals or concerts we'd come back here – by now there were about 12 of us – and for two years we just met when we could and played for pleasure,' Marriner told me a couple of years ago. 'And because we were all string players we'd focus on the string pieces and the most obvious was Italian Baroque repertoire. We talked about the sort of sound we'd like to make and there was a great deal of discussion and disputing, and some very hard, fixed ideas had to be melted down.'

At the time, Marriner – who had studied at the Royal College of Music – was principal second violin with the LSO and also, as is common with London-based musicians, playing in other ensembles. He toured with Karajan, and was a deputy in the Philharmonia for the celebrated Toscanini Brahms concerts in 1952: 'Naturally we were all petrified before the first rehearsal – he was a grand old man then, about 85, and his sight wasn't wonderful, though his hearing was pretty good. But it didn't matter – as soon as he picked up the baton the adrenalin was flowing through the orchestra. You could measure it in buckets! It was extraordinary.' Marriner was also working regularly with Thurston Dart, playing in his Jacobean Ensemble: Dart was to be a major influence.

The ASMF's first concerts attracted considerable critical acclaim and brought them to the attention of Louise Dyer, who offered them a six-disc recording contract with her L'Oiseau-Lyre label. The first LP was of music by Corelli, Torelli, Locatelli, Albicastro and Handel, and, as Denis Stevens, reviewing it in



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*Gramophone*'s February 1962 issue, concluded: 'Here is nearly an hour's music, played with precision, care, consummate musicianship, and with more sense of style than all the chamber orchestras in Europe put together.'

The programme is intelligently planned and gives great pleasure to the listener, whether amateur or connoisseur...

Neville Marriner and his Academy are to be congratulated on a magnificent disc debut, and I have no hesitation in declaring this to be one of the three or four most outstanding items in the Oiseau Lyre catalogue.'

Something extraordinary had been launched.

Over the next half-century, as they pushed back their musical boundaries, the Academy's recordings for Argo, and then Philips, Decca, EMI, CBS/Sony Classical and a host of independent labels, sold in staggering quantities. Works from the Classical period followed, and then, for Argo, music of the 20th century – tackled with consummate style. Marriner and the ASMF epitomised the best that British musicians offered: immense professionalism (though done with a lightness of touch that also embraced some now legendary practical joking at sessions), total ease with the recording process and an ability to create a 'live' atmosphere in the studio.

The music of Mozart formed the core of the ASMF's repertoire – they recorded the complete symphonies, all the piano concertos (with Alfred Brendel), numerous choral works (with the Academy's choir, founded in 1975 and trained by Laszlo Heltay) and, later, the three Da Ponte operas. They recorded Haydn (symphonies and choral works) and wonderfully vibrant cycles of the symphonies of Beethoven and Schubert. From Mozart it's not too big a jump to Rossini, and Marriner's recordings of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *La cenerentola* and *Il turco in Italia* made quite an impression, Marriner revealing a feeling for drama that should not have come as a surprise given the inherent theatricality of his symphonic work.

If the music-making is a mirror of the man, Marriner's many recordings are suitably revealing. His urbane, understated charm emerges in every bar; the sympathy with which he accompanies a young artist making his or her first concerto recording is a delight (there's a lovely sense of 'rightness' that Joshua Bell – who launched his career with a Bruch/Mendelssohn coupling under Marriner's baton – should have succeeded him in 2011 as music director of the ASMF). Marriner was wonderful company – funny and effortlessly charming. I remember a dinner party for Christopher Hogwood's 70th birthday when he recalled, without the merest hint of regret or bitterness, how he and Chris, a regular continuo player with the ASMF, had parted ways – one to stick to his guns, the other to embrace 'period' performance with the Academy of Ancient Music. Indeed, he was obviously delighted at the other Academy's success.

Marriner maintained a seemingly daunting freelance career, holding posts with the LA Chamber Orchestra, which he founded, between 1969 and '78, the Minnesota Orchestra (1979-86) and Stuttgart RSO (1986-89). He wasn't the conductor to go to for Bruckner, and larger symphonic fare rarely met with the same critical acclaim as his ASMF performances, but give him a Classical work or something written in the 20th-century for chamber orchestra, and he and his superb band couldn't be bettered. He was, in his unassuming way, a true pioneer.

# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

As Murray Perahia moves from Sony Classical to DG, Harriet Smith welcomes his first recording for the Yellow Label, Bach's Six French Suites



Bach

Six French Suites, BWV812-817

Murray Perahia *p*

DG M ② 479 6565GH2 (92' • DDD)

Recent research shows that, though divorce rates are falling in the UK, there's an upward trend among the over-50s. The theory is that now we're longer lived, we're less inclined to settle for familiar domesticity when we could be off sailing the seven seas. That might account for Murray Perahia – 70 next April – calling time on Sony Classical after an apparently happy marriage of 43 years. So here he is setting off for pastures new with DG; and, honeymoon period or not, the fit looks good with this, his first recording of Bach's *French Suites*, pieces that have been in his concert repertoire for decades.

In the booklet interview Perahia reveals that his first encounter with Bach in concert was as a teenager when he heard Pablo Casals conducting the *St Matthew Passion* at Carnegie Hall. Perahia and Casals, though temperamentally very different, have in common a sense of bringing across Bach the man rather than Bach the god. And that's particularly pertinent in the *French Suites*, the most approachable – though no less inspiring or perfectly conceived – of Bach's keyboard suites.

As we expect from Perahia, everything sounds natural and inevitable. Ego doesn't come into it: rather, he acts as a conduit between composer and audience with a purity that few can emulate (I'm put in mind of Goode, Brendel and the new boy on the block, Levit). Ah yes, 'intellectual' pianists, I hear you mutter. But to describe any of these figures as merely 'intellectual' would be to miss out the huge humanity of their playing.



*Perahia has in common with Casals a sense of bringing across Bach the man rather than Bach the god*

Take the opening Allemande of the Fourth Suite: in Perahia's hands it's a sinuous, conversational affair and the way he colours the lines as Bach reaches into the upper register is done with enormous



subtlety. Or sample the Sarabande of the same suite, simultaneously intimate yet with true gravity. He brings out the left hand's largely stepwise motion to a nicety – sometimes reassuring, sometimes questioning.

Perahia is not an artist who takes Bach to extremes: he doesn't intervene in the way that Maria João Pires or Piotr Anderszewski can do to such mesmerising effect. Take the gigues, for instance. Some take the buoyant Gigue of the Fifth Suite at a more headlong pace, yet Perahia's feels just so: the rhythms are bright and springy, full of energy without freneticism, and joy is palpable in every note. Or that of the Second Suite, which again sounds completely inevitable, even when he splices it, on its repeats, with dazzlingly daring ornamentation that underlines the inherent dissonances within Bach's counterpoint. Compared to this, Peter Hill seems a touch staid, Ekaterina Derzhavina somewhat terse, though Pires's utterly forlorn interpretation is compelling in an entirely different way.

Perahia's ornamentation could fill the review on its own, for he's happy to take risks, yet they never sound like risks, so firmly are they sewn into the musical cloth. Sample what he does with the Fifth Suite's bustling Bourrée, glistening and playful. Or the Anglaise of Suite No 3, which is more unbuttoned in Perahia's hands than in Angela Hewitt's precisely imagined account. Preference will come down to personal taste.

With some artists, you have a sense that their personality comes across most strongly in the main structural movements of the *French Suites* – the opening allemandes, pivotal sarabandes and closing gigues. But one of the delights of this set is what Perahia does with the in-between movements.



Murray Perahia: playing Bach with a balance of intellect and humanity

The Air in the Second Suite, for instance, which succeeds a Sarabande as full of pathos as any reading, twinkles with an easy playfulness; or the Loure of the Fifth, its dotted rhythms rendered with such poetry, Perahia's ornamentation generous yet never overbearing. Or take the pair of Gavottes from the Fourth Suite, the first purposefully busy, the second a *moto perpetuo* of sinew and determination, but both having – that word again – a real sense of joy.

Perahia's pacing is unerring throughout, and even if you tend to favour this movement slower, that one faster, the sense of narrative that he brings to these suites as a whole is utterly persuasive. Again, examples are manifold, but to take just one, try the Courante of the Sixth Suite, its streams of semiquavers and interplay between the

hands a thing of delight. At the double bar, before the section repeat and before embarking on the second section, we get the slightest of hesitations, Perahia pausing just long enough to let the music breathe. It's as if we exhale with him. All this would count for little were we not able to hear him in such beautifully immediate sound. So we should also pay tribute to Perahia's longtime producer Andreas Neubronner, engineer Martin Nagorni and king among piano whisperers, technician Ulrich Gerhartz.

I've only had this recording for five days but I predict a long and happy future in its company. **G**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Hewitt (2/96) (HYPE) CDA67121/2*

*Hill (3/16) (DELP) DCD34166*

*Derzhavina (3/16) (PROF) PH14043*

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#### Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Orchestral



## Andrew Achenbach listens to Martyn Brabbins's new Elgar disc:

'What breathtaking hush these impressive artists convey at the beginning of the mighty home stretch' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 32**



## David Gutman on Andrew Litton's Prokofiev Symphonies Nos 4 and 7:

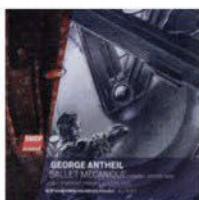
'If you're looking for a sonically state-of-the-art option, Andrew Litton's latest disc arguably trumps them all' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**

### Antheil

'Ballet mécanique'

A Jazz Symphony (original version, 1925).  
Ballet pour instruments mécaniques et  
percussion (original version, 1924)

**Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose**  
BMOP/sound 1033 (40' • DDD)



The milieu into  
which George  
Antheil introduced  
his mid-1920s *Ballet*

*mécanique* and *A Jazz Symphony* was already reverberating with the sounds of Stravinsky's *Les noces*, Varèse's *Ionisation* and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* – composers who were considered Messiahs when Antheil was a mere 'bad boy of music'.

*Ballet mécanique* reminds you that nothing dates faster than self-conscious visions of the future, especially compared to genuinely visionary scores such as *Les noces* or *Ionisation*, while Antheil's *Jazz Symphony* proves no match for the graceful charms of Gershwin's various symphonic jazz hybrids. On their 2005 CPO release, Eiji Oue and the NDR Radio Philharmonie made the fatal mistake of performing Antheil's 1955 rewrite of *A Jazz Symphony* (CPO, 6/06), which ironed out its Heath Robinson structure and tamed the ill-behaved harmonic language of the original 1925 version as restored here by Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. Even in this spunky, punky performance you'd be hard-pressed, in all honesty, to claim that the notes are memorable or fuelled by implacable internal logic – and so Rose, instead, goes for the high-energy blow out.

Jittery energies derive in part from Antheil's abrupt editing of material – his delight in letting his structure fall through trapdoors. Around the 7'00" mark we're listening to Antheil looping note patterns shamelessly lifted from *The Rite of Spring* (the 'Danse de la terre' section) and then suddenly we're not, as a salty trombone solo, underpinned by chugging banjo,

parachutes us into a clone of Duke Ellington's *The Mooche*. The *Ballet pour instruments mécaniques et percussion* (to give its full title) also freeloads off Stravinsky, with Antheil's instrumentation of 16 player pianos, two regular pianos, three xylophones, seven electric bells, three propellers, a siren, four bass drums and tam-tam guaranteed to turn in a spectacle.

Cascading Ivesian piano clusters that tumble free of the ensemble in the *Jazz Symphony* form the base palette of *Ballet mécanique*. But whereas the symphony loses credibility when Antheil splices in a cornball romantic theme to provide contrast, *Ballet mécanique* is relentless in its monumental walls of sound built from bricks of meshed scales and arpeggios. Putting aside Antheil's shortcomings as a composer, Rose's achievement in differentiating compacted layers to let melodic fragments shine is masterful. This is the most accomplished Antheil disc around. **Philip Clark**

*See this month's celebration of BMOP/sound's 50th release on page 20*

### CPE Bach

Flute Concertos - Wq22 H425 (H426 or 484/1);  
Wq166 H430; Wq169 H445

**Emmanuel Pahud / Potsdam Chamber Academy / Trevor Pinnock hpd**

Warner Classics 2564 62767-9 (67' • DDD)



It's perhaps rather unorthodox to begin a review by dealing with the accompanying sleeve notes, but still, here I go, because there couldn't be a clearer indication and partner to the delights to come on this disc than the above-the-bar introduction you'll find within this booklet's pages.

The wild, unorthodox music composed by CPE Bach while harpsichordist to King Frederick the Great is often attributed to career frustration, far down as he was within the court's musical pecking order. Pahud, however, suggests that Bach's lowly position

actually put him at an advantage, allowing him the freedom to be inspired by his surroundings without having to toe the musical line. So his music doesn't represent internal turmoil but was instead inspired by the political, military and artistic climate of his age. 'It was probably clear to Carl Philipp Emanuel that the Prussia of his masters was coming to an end,' suggests Pahud, 'that the yearning for a new, republican Germany was already on the horizon.'

Don't expect to be soothed by this disc, therefore, because Pahud's performances bear out all of the above: urgent, direct, effortlessly virtuoso to the *n*th degree, always lyrical and awash with conviction, these are readings that will keep you on your toes. The D minor's third movement in particular is electrifying stuff. It's also worth parking any sniffiness over modern flutes, for Pahud can produce as dulcet a tone as anybody on a period instrument could. Add the crack team of Pinnock and the Kammerakademie Potsdam (and Pahud's chamber moments with them are every bit as ear-grabbing as the flashy stuff), and what you have here is a disc of properly exciting CPE Bach. **Charlotte Gardner**

### G Benjamin · Ligeti · Murail

**G Benjamin** Palimpsests Ligeti Lontano

**Murail** Le désenchantement du monde<sup>a</sup>

**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** pf Bavarian Radio

Symphony Orchestra / George Benjamin

Neos 1422 (62' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulessaal, Munich,

May 2-4, 2012



Search for a composer connecting George Benjamin to Tristan Murail, and look no further than Olivier Messiaen, who taught the two of them. But on this very fine recording of major works by both, taken live from the Herkulessaal in 2012 and without much bronchial interference, György Ligeti is the reference, the context of choice.



'Urgent, direct, effortlessly virtuoso' – Emmanuel Pahud, in the studio with Trevor Pinnock

His *Lontano* (1967) acts as overture. Benjamin leads a superlative performance, one surprisingly visceral for a piece about distance. Little reaches the gossamer fragility in parts of Abbado's Vienna account but the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra supply more immediacy, with a richness that they might also deploy in, say, Strauss. That's not to say that the textures clot: flecks of melody flicker in the ear, enticing and disappearing in a moment; the balancing that makes that possible is admirable.

Benjamin's own *Palimpsests* (1998–2002) come off well, too, and again the Bavarians' playing is special. Take the opening moments of *Palimpsest I*, when the brass, caustic and stark, smack at winding, indeterminate clarinets, or the snarling, nasty layering at the climax of the darker *Palimpsest II*. This is some of Benjamin's most forthright writing, and it benefits from the larger scale and broader palette this orchestra offers compared to the Ensemble Modern on the composer's previous recording.

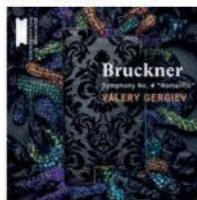
The titles of *Lontano* and *Palimpsests* point to something in the music; if the same is true of Murail's *Le désenchantement du monde* (2011/12), a reference to Max Weber, it escapes me. In this 'concerto symphonique' for piano, Murail turns away

from explicit spectralism, though the alternately placid and volcanic result still dwells on the nature and properties of sound. Pierre-Laurent Aimard is as strong an advocate as always, and Murail devotees should not hesitate, but the Ligeti and Benjamin are the thing here. **David Allen**

*Lontano – selected comparison:*  
VPO, Abbado (4/90\*) (DG) 479 0567GTC  
*Palimpsests – comparative version:*  
Ens Modern, Benjamin (1/05) (NIMB) NI5732

## Bruckner

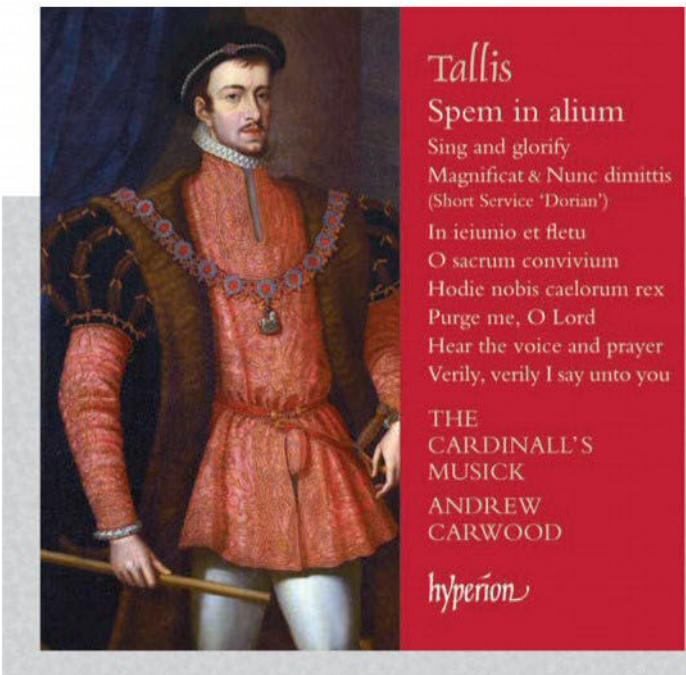
**Symphony No 4, 'Romantic'**  
(1878/80 version, ed Nowak)  
**Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev**  
Münchner Philharmoniker © MPH0002  
(68' • DDD)  
Recorded live at the Gasteig, Munich,  
September 22–23, 2015



Given their long history of Bruckner performances under principal conductors such as Hausegger, Kabasta, Celibidache and Thielemann, the Munich Philharmonic's decision to launch their own label with a recording of the composer's

Fourth Symphony seems entirely fitting. But what about Valery Gergiev as a Brucknerian? Some occasional performances from his Rotterdam Philharmonic tenure notwithstanding, Gergiev has shown relatively little interest in Bruckner's music before now. But, were someone to play this disc without knowing the identity of the performers, he or she could be forgiven for suspecting the presence of an experienced Bruckner conductor at the helm. Here we have a performance where the symphony's long-term structure is compellingly charted and directed, *allegros* are underpinned with a compelling muscularity and Brucknerian mystery features in abundance. There are no untoward interpretative quirks, the playing is resplendent and dynamic markings are observed with an unusual conscientiousness. The ruminative *Andante*, one of the composer's more elusive movements, is especially strong in terms of feeling and atmosphere.

Were that the extent of the matter, this recording could be recommended with enthusiasm. Unlike the near-silent backgrounds offered by most modern live recordings, however, some occasional faint audience noise is occasionally apparent during the performance, although not to an extent that I found intrusive. More



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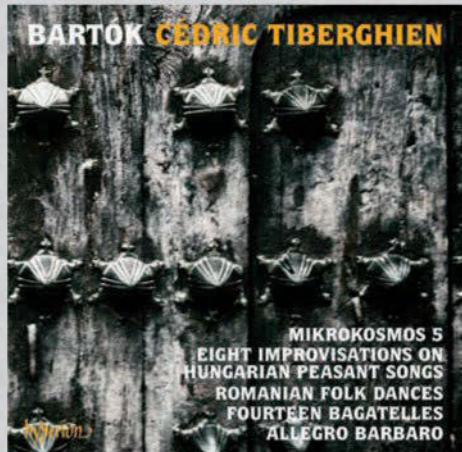
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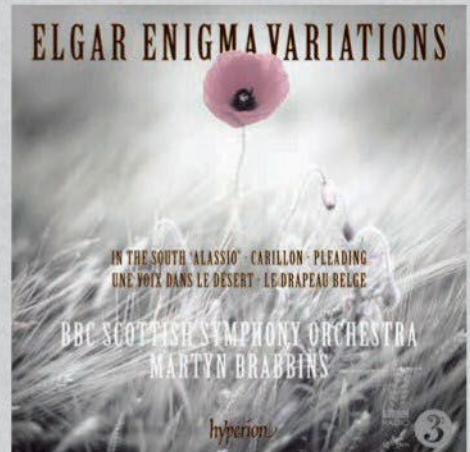
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## COMING SOON ...

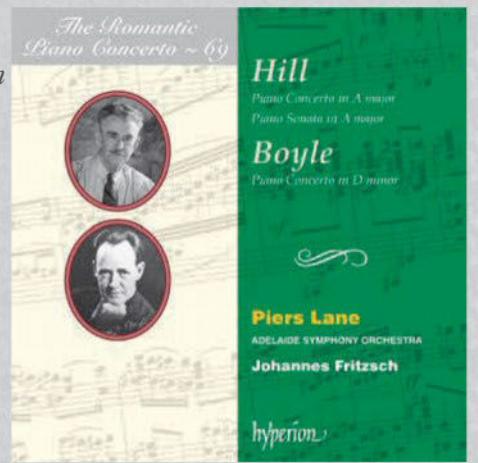
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Bruch: Violin Concerto No 2 & other works Jack Liebeck (violin), BBC Scottish SO, Martyn Brabbins (conductor)  
Kozeluch: Piano Concertos Nos 1, 5 & 6 Howard Shelley (piano), London Mozart Players  
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noticeable are the occasional puffs and murmurings, presumably from Gergiev himself, that occur from time to time during the performance. Most significant is the fact that oboe and clarinet fail to enter in bar 44 of the Scherzo's Trio (6'14"), something that I would have expected to have been remedied at the editing stage. And as so often, a recording that is a model of transparency at lower levels becomes slightly congested and opaque in *tutti* passages. Some listeners may be untroubled by these issues but they do detract from the value of an otherwise prominent release. **Christian Hoskins**

## Bruckner

Symphony No 8

(original version, 1887, ed Nowak)

Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi

Accentus/Philharmonia Rec   PHR0105  
(92' • DDD)



Although the 1887 version of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony is generally regarded as being inferior to the revision that appeared in 1890, the original version nevertheless represents three years of concentrated effort by a composer working at the peak of his creativity. One of the great 'what ifs' of musical history is what might have happened had the conductor Hermann Levi, a champion of Bruckner's music, not been so perplexed by the new work that he felt unable to perform it, causing the composer to put aside the Ninth Symphony in favour of a series of revisions of not only the Eighth Symphony but also nearly all of his major works up to and including the Fourth Symphony. If Levi had appreciated the Eighth, the version performed on this recording might have become the only one known today.

Given the relatively small number of conductors who have performed the 1887 version, recordings of the score are differentiated by a surprisingly wide variety of running times, ranging from the fleet 76 minutes of Eliahu Inbal's pioneering recording for Teldec to the more leisurely 99 minutes of Kent Nagano's traversal for Farao Classics. The new recording comes in at 92 minutes, which is longer than most, but is not a disproportionate timing given that the original version of the symphony is some 10 per cent longer than the revised version. Luisi's interpretation is marked by scrupulous observance of dynamics, a finely balanced orchestral palate and rock-steady tempi. As far as I can tell, this is the first recording of a Bruckner symphony by the

Philharmonia Zurich (the orchestra of Zurich Opera), but one would never know it from their idiomatic and cultivated playing. With clear and spacious sound, the result is at least as fine as any other recording of the 1887 score currently available. **Christian Hoskins**

## Czernowin

The Crescendo Trilogy - *The Quiet*<sup>a</sup>; *Zohar iver* (Blind Radiance)<sup>b</sup>; *Esh*<sup>c</sup>. White Wind Waiting<sup>d</sup>.

At the Fringe of Our Gaze<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Kai Wessel *counterten* <sup>d</sup>Stephan Schmidt *gtr*

<sup>b</sup>Ensemble Nikel; <sup>a</sup>Bavarian Radio Symphony

Orchestra / Brad Lubman; <sup>b</sup>Berne Symphony

Orchestra / Mario Venzago; <sup>c</sup>Cottbus State

Theatre Philharmonic Orchestra / Evan Christ;

<sup>d</sup>SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and

Freiburg / François-Xavier Roth; <sup>e</sup>West-Eastern

Divan Orchestra / Daniel Barenboim

Wergo  WER7319-2 (77' • DDD)

Recorded live at the <sup>a</sup>bKonzerthaus Theater Bern,

October 20, 2011; <sup>c</sup>Cottbus State Theatre, June 8,

2012; <sup>e</sup>Kultur- und Kongresszentrum Luzern,

Lucerne Festival, August 18, 2013; <sup>d</sup>Lucerne

Festival, September 10, 2013



Less is more, as the saying goes. It's a paradox that Chaya Czernowin (b1957) pushes to the hilt here, crafting orchestral soundscapes that manage – somehow – to be monumentally minuscule, enormously small.

Each of the five works presents a sound environment of wisps, susurrations, noises, and the odd pitched note. Key to the music's success, though, is Czernowin's subtle layering of these different instruments and sound types. *The Quiet* (2010) is a good example. Inspired, Czernowin says, by watching a blizzard at night through her window, it presents 'an avalanche in reverse': strictly speaking an impossible event, which is nonetheless evoked by different shades and densities of white noise passing around three orchestral groups. In this way the delicacy of a snowflake, magnified, attains the thundering of a snowstorm.

Similar paradoxes pop up in *Zohar iver*, Hebrew for 'Blind Radiance'. *Zohar iver* is, along with *The Quiet*, part of *The Crescendo Trilogy*, the last part of which is *Esh*, wherein the orchestra is joined by a countertenor (who sings drawn-out non-semantic tones). Moments of *Zohar iver* sound like a microphone turned to a jungle undergrowth, as marimba and woodblock trade rhythmic signals, high strings shimmer and woodwinds exude soft cries. This delicate approach suggests something like an ecology of sounds.

The disc closes with *At the Fringe of Our Gaze*. Commissioned by Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, the piece begins with relatively traditional elements – legato strings, counterpoint, clear rhythms – which are then stripped away to reveal (as Czernowin puts it) what's hidden beneath, 'the undercurrent...which is where my music really starts'. A section of clusters, slow glissandos and rasping brass opens suddenly on to a terrific spatial expanse, like a forest clearing: reed-rustle of strings, drip-drip-drip of double bass, spume of percussion. It's all quite impressive, and the instrumental filigree is precisely rendered by the five different orchestras. **Liam Cagney**

## Debussy · Françaix · Nielsen

'Clarinet Concertos'

Debussy Première Rhapsodie Françaix Clarinet Concerto Nielsen Clarinet Concerto, Op 57

Vladimir Soltan 

Hamburg Symphony Orchestra / José Luiz Gomez

Dabringhaus und Grimm  MDG9011964-6

(58' • DDD/DSD)



'A clarinet can sound as hysterical as – pardon me – a woman.' Irmlind Capelle's booklet-note quotes Carl Nielsen's provocative description of the instrument, which the composer also likened to 'screaming like a tramcar on poorly greased rails'. Nielsen's 1928 concerto opens Belarusian Vladimir Soltan's entertaining disc, which contains a lively trio of virtuoso works composed during the 20th century.

In the Nielsen, Soltan is up against stiff competition, not least from star names such as Martin Fröst and Sabine Meyer, but holds his own in a pugnacious reading. His sinewy tone suits this knotty work and his playing – scrupulously observed dynamics and precisely tongued staccatos – is impressive. Soltan is superb in the terrifying cadenzas, especially his lightning leaps between registers in the third 'movement' (tr 3, 4'59"). José Luiz Gomez and the Hamburg SO provide keen support, particularly the first bassoon and the tenacious snare drum.

Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie* began life as an examination piece for the Paris Conservatoire but took on a concert life of its own. It is sinuous and sexy – the clarinet equivalent of the flute in Debussy's *Faune*. Soltan could afford to be a little more sensuous here, revelling in the languor more. He excels, however, in the larky 1967 concerto by Jean Françaix, ducking and diving through the first movement

with insouciant ease. Everything about this concerto is fun, the clarinet even hopping, skipping and trilling through the 'slow movement'. The *AllegriSSimo* finale finds Soltan strutting down the boulevard in finest dandy mode, making Françaix's 'aerial acrobatics' sound easy. A fun ending to a fine disc. **Mark Pullinger**

*Nielsen – selected comparisons:*

*Fröst, Lahti SO, Vänskä (5/07) (BIS) BIS-SACD1463*  
*Meyer, BPO, Rattle (A/07) (EMI/WARN) 394421-2*

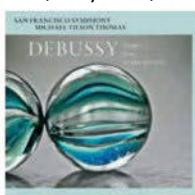
## Debussy

*Images<sup>a</sup>, Jeux<sup>b</sup>, La plus que lente<sup>c</sup>*

**San Francisco Symphony Orchestra / Michael Tilson Thomas**

SFS Media  SFS0069 (60' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, <sup>b</sup>January 10-13, <sup>c</sup>September 26-28, 2013; <sup>a</sup>May 22-25, 2014



Although it was overshadowed by the furore surrounding the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* a fortnight later, Debussy's ballet *Jeux* itself provoked a storm – chiefly of bewilderment – when it was first staged at the same Paris theatre in May 1913, and it has had a somewhat nervous presence in the record catalogues, and certainly in live performances, ever since.

The latest conductor to brave this fascinating, tantalisingly enigmatic, elusive, evanescent score is Michael Tilson Thomas, who combines *Jeux* with *Images* and *La plus que lente* on a disc drawn from concerts with his San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in 2013 and 2014. *Jeux* calls for extremes of discrimination in terms of instrumental balance together with similar discipline in achieving absolute clarity in the superfine but intricate web of textures and thematic allusions. This is not impossible, as we know from Pierre Boulez conducting the Cleveland Orchestra in the 1990s and, especially, from Bernard Haitink and the Concertgebouw Orchestra on a disc that won the *Gramophone* Award in 1980 in both the orchestral and engineering categories. Compared with those two, Tilson Thomas's version is a good, overall reading of the score, its structure coherent, its ebbs and flows well judged. But the precision of colour and the subtle spectrum of dynamics that Haitink and Boulez achieve still place their recordings on pedestals of their own.

However, Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco players are more compelling in *Images*, which comes across with brilliance, swagger, suppleness and, in 'Les parfums

de la nuit', suggestive exoticism. *La plus que lente*, with its tangy cimbalom and its tinges of nostalgia and ebullience, makes for a beguiling envoi. **Geoffrey Norris**

*Jeux – selected comparisons:*

*RCO, Haitink (11/80<sup>a</sup>, 3/94) (PHIL) 438 742-2PM2*  
*Cleveland Orch, Boulez (3/95) (DG) 439 896-2GH*

## Diepenbrock

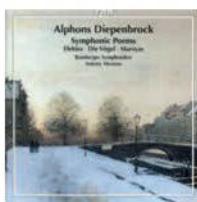
'Symphonic Poems'

*Elektra* – suite. *Marsyas* – incidental music.

*De Vogels* – overture

**Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Antony Hermus**

CPO  CPO077 927-2 (68' • DDD)



The Dutch composer Alphons Diepenbrock (1862-1921) was one of music's great amateurs.

An academic classicist by profession, he was self-taught as a composer, and, despite the admiration and encouragement of Mahler and Willem Mengelberg, never abandoned his day job as a teacher and private tutor. The works recorded here – misleadingly described on the cover as 'symphonic poems' – consist of concert versions of three of his theatre scores on classical subjects: an overture for Aristophanes' *The Birds* (1918); choruses and melodramas for Sophocles' *Electra* (1920), posthumously arranged as a symphonic suite by Eduard Reeser; and the incidental music for *Marsyas* (1910), a play by his pupil Balthazar Verhagen that reworks the grim Ovidian narrative of Marsyas and Apollo as a comedy of erotic rivalry.

*Marsyas* finds Diepenbrock in thrall to Debussy – he dubbed it 'my faun' – though the string writing also suggests a close familiarity with *Verklärte Nacht*. The *Vogels* overture, meanwhile, is pitched somewhere between the *Meistersinger* apprentices and *Till Eulenspiegel*, and contains some wonderfully complex woodwind polyphony. Though he admired Strauss, Diepenbrock deemed the latter's *Elektra* un-Sophoclean, and his own score on the subject is not so much a study in obsession as a meditation on such ideas as the curse on the House of Atreus and the proscriptive nature of divine justice. Diepenbrock intended the choruses to be danced as well as sung, and the central movements are very balletic and rather genteel.

Though the music is variable, the performances are classy. Antony Hermus can't quite disguise that fact that *Marsyas* meanders a bit, though the Bamberg Symphony's playing is beautifully textured. Once past its agitated, Mahlerian opening, *Elektra* is all lofty nobility and graceful elegance: Reeser's orchestration of the

choruses can be monochrome and the vocal originals might have been preferable here. The *Vogels* overture is arguably the best and certainly the most consistent of the three scores; it's done with impudent wit and panache, and the Bamberg woodwind are simply outstanding.

**Tim Ashley**

## Elgar

*Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma'*

*Op 36. In the South (Alassio), Op 50. Carillon,*

*Op 75<sup>a</sup>. Une voix dans le désert, Op 77<sup>b</sup>. Le*

*drapeau belge, Op 79<sup>a</sup>. Pleading, Op 48<sup>c</sup>*

<sup>b</sup>Kate Royal sop <sup>c</sup>Yann Ghiro cl

<sup>a</sup>Florence Daguere de Hureaux narr

**BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins**

Hyperion  CDA68101 (82' • DDD • T/t)



Martyn Brabbins masterminds an expansive, ideally flexible and notably unflustered reading of Elgar's *In the South*,

one which quarries this evocative score's plentiful reserves of noble grandeur, pantheistic wonder and vulnerability in a way that perceptively demonstrates its kinship with the First Symphony that was soon to follow. In the *Grandioso* episode starting at fig 20 or 7'01" the Roman legions certainly march by with suitably menacing swagger. However, it's the softer moments that truly stand out: the principal viola's ravishing 'Canto popolare' at the work's intimate heart is as wistfully fragrant as I can ever recall; and what breathtaking hush these impressive artists convey at the beginning of the mighty home stretch (try from the *tranquillo* marking at fig 51 or 19'03").

Brabbins proves a comparably unhurried, affectionate and cannily observant guide through *Enigma*, the friends pictured within springing to life with unforced naturalness. As ever in Elgar, the antiphonal placement of first and second violins pays handsome dividends, and felicitous touches abound, not least the gorgeously shimmering textures of 'CAE' (whose reappearance in the finale has an overwhelming rightness about it) and the strings' whiplash attack at the start of 'GRS'. Other highlights include an especially tender 'WN', generously songful 'BGN' and deeply moving 'Romanza'. Like Pierre Monteux's famous 1958 LSO version, 'Nimrod' sets out at a genuinely ear-pricking *ppp*, but the string timbre in Glasgow sounds a tad clinical by the side of that glowing Kingsway Hall production.



Martyn Brabbins directs the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in a stimulating Elgar sequence

We're also treated to a trio of patriotic wartime offerings in support of occupied Belgium. Each benefits from some superbly articulate orchestral playing, narrator Florence Daguerre de Hureaux declaims Emile Cammaerts's French texts to the manner born, and soprano Kate Royal makes an eloquent contribution in *Une voix dans le désert* (by some margin the most imaginative of the group). Finally, and pushing the playing time to over 80 minutes, comes a first recording of Elgar's purely orchestral arrangement of his own 1908 song 'Pleading', which shows the BBC Scottish SO's long-standing Principal Clarinet, Yann Ghiro, at his considerable best.

To sum up, an enjoyable and stimulating anthology that Elgarians everywhere should try and hear. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Grieg

'Wonderland'

Piano Concerto, Op 16<sup>a</sup>. Lyric Pieces:

Op 12 - Nos 4 & 7; Op 43 Nos 1 & 6;

Op 54 Nos 3 & 4; Op 64 No 4; Op 65

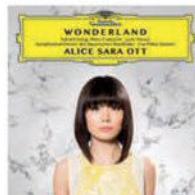
Nos 5 & 6; Op 71 No 1. Peer Gynt - In the

Hall of the Mountain King; Solveig's Song

**Alice Sara Ott /s/ Bavarian Radio Symphony**

**Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen**

DG 479 4631 (66' • DDD)



When Alice Sara Ott's *Liszt Transcendental Etudes* appeared a few years back (3/10),

I was mightily impressed. But the nearly simultaneous release of her still ripening Chopin Waltzes (2/10) gave pause for thought. Had pressure from overly eager promoters at DG resulted in a misfire? Subsequent desultory releases led me to wonder if my initial enthusiasm had been misplaced altogether.

As sincerely as I would wish that Ott's new Grieg CD has swept away all doubts, I must part company with colleagues whose praise of the disc has bordered on the effusive. Esa-Pekka Salonen and the superb Bavarians carry the Concerto, providing one of the most sumptuous, vibrant and finely honed accompaniments imaginable. Cello, flute, oboe, bassoon and horn solos are each more ravishing than the last. When Ott's curious reticence, manifest mostly as contrived rubato, threatens to bring things to a halt, the orchestra step in to save the day. In the first-movement cadenza, Ott so inflates the massive chordal statement of the principal theme that the line is lost. Most successful is

the *Adagio*, with some nice interplay between soloist and orchestra. Its aura, however, is quickly dispelled in the finale, where Ott's capricious rubato again obtrudes.

On her own Ott seems more comfortable. Several of the *Lyric Pieces* exude a genuine charm, though in slower tempi her tendency to come to a full stop between phrases can lend the music a static quality. In more brisk pieces such as 'Wedding Day at Troldhaugen' (Op 65 No 6), overstated emphases sap momentum. Compared to the exquisite Grieg recordings by Andsnes, Hough or Pletnev, not to mention those of Rubinstein or Gieseking, these readings face an uphill battle.

DG's characteristically luxurious sound reproduction is a big factor in the disc's appeal. Meanwhile, we must wait for Ott to exhaust her self-conscious striving after originality and truly find her groove. She has so much to offer. **Patrick Rucker**

## Haubenstock-Ramati

Konstellationen. Morendo - double/echo.

Pluriel. Multiple 4. String Trio No 1, 'Ricercari'

**Vera Fischer /s/ Klangforum Wien**

Kairos 0015003KAI (66' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Semper-Depot, Vienna, October 30, 2010



This is a moment worth savouring, because discs documenting work by

the Polish composer Roman Haubenstock-Ramati (1919-94) come along only very rarely. Haubenstock-Ramati's aim, which might also explain his relative obscurity, was to move musicians beyond what he perceived as the comfort zone of conventional notation, and Klangforum Wien offer three separate performances – 'readings' might be a more appropriate word – of *Konstellationen* (1971), a score expressed as a sequence of 25 coloured etchings.

If the pictorial beauty of these images is obvious (take a look by Googling Haubenstock-Ramati's title), the question of how exactly to interpret his fracturing lines and disembodied note heads as sound is left hanging. Graphic notation refuseniks invariably raise the objection that, no matter who the composer, graphic pieces sound unmistakably of a type (graphic notation being notation that replaces notes, bars and staves with symbols, charts and/or diagrams) – classical performers left to their own devices will, the argument goes, inevitably default to doodling approximations of semi-remembered arpeggios and other stock figurations.

But never have I heard music like this before, which would suggest that Haubenstock-Ramati refined his notation to the point at which symbols score a deeper psychological impact on musicians than perhaps even they realise. Instantly you become aware of an intensity of listening from these alert and sensitive ensembles – winds, strings and accordion – as players tiptoe towards orientating themselves around a structure that has yet to reveal itself. That distinct concentration and energy which derives from musicians' feeling, rather than reading, their way forwards is the whole point of graphic notation.

Haubenstock-Ramati's graphics gradually build a network of association by continually spinning a feeder pool of basic symbols – bold lines, scattering dots, architecturally centring circles – into fresh contexts, mashing up the permutations and altering the perspective between foreground and background. The second version is anchored around Krassimir Sterev's accordion, with the other instruments shifted spatially into the background; a third version coalesces into a dramatic narrative that begins to feel explicitly composerly.

To set the scene, the disc opens with an early, Weernesque String Trio, and those

various takes on *Konstellationen* are cushioned by an intensely argued performance of *Multiple 4* for oboe and horn, and Haubenstock-Ramati's last work, the radiantly delicate textures of *Morendo – double/echo* (1991) for bass flute and tape.

Philip Clark

## Hill · Boyle

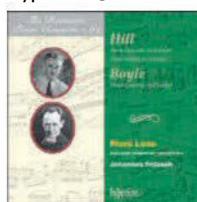
'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 69'

**Boyle** Piano Concerto<sup>a</sup>

**Hill** Piano Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Piano Sonata

**Piers Lane pf<sup>a</sup>** **Adelaide Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Fritzsch**

Hyperion (CDA68135 (80' • DDD)



Few of us, I suspect, will have encountered either of these Australian composers, so a brief introduction is in order. The long-lived Alfred Hill (1869-1960) hailed from Melbourne, was trained in Leipzig (a fact that will not surprise anyone after hearing the two works here) and, returning to the Antipodes, eventually settled in Sydney to become, in Neville Cardus's description, 'the grand old man of Australian music' (he amassed over 200 works in every genre). George Boyle (1886-1948) was born in Sydney, never to return after leaving in 1905 to study for five years with Busoni in Berlin. He made his career in America, teaching at the Peabody, Curtis and Juilliard schools. Among his students were Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber.

As to their music, I cannot say I was bowled over with an urgent desire to investigate the rest of their output. Hill's Concerto in A major from 1941, in effect a piano-and-orchestra version of his Piano Sonata in A major from 1920, which is imaginatively included here, is in four movements with the kind of now-dated subtitles one often encounters in music of the earlier decade: 'The Question', 'Fancies', 'Homage to Chopin' and 'Contrasts'. It lasts 26 minutes and includes every cliché of the Romantic piano concerto of the 1860s and '70s without adding anything new or individual, though the Chopin movement is very pretty and the finale has an attractively jaunty, open-air Percy Grainger feel to it.

The Boyle Concerto, too, is a throwback to the second half of the 19th century, though written in 1911. Glimpses of Tchaikovsky at his most ebullient, second-hand phrases of Rachmaninov and prescient pastiches from the classical film 'concertos' of the 1940s (*Cornish Rhapsody*, *Warsaw Concerto*, etc) seem to provide most of the character and material. One cannot

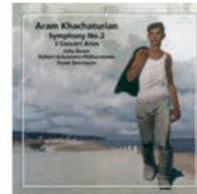
imagine a more persuasive, artful advocate of the music of his two compatriots than Piers Lane who, frankly, is worth hearing in whatever he plays. However, I think this 69th volume of Hyperion's series is one to hear once or twice before saying a polite 'thank you' and moving on. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Khachaturian

Symphony No 2. Three Concert Arias<sup>a</sup>

**Julia Bauer sop Robert-Schumann-Philharmonie / Frank Beermann**

CPO (CPO777 972-2 (72' • DDD • T/t)



London bus syndrome strikes: you wait over 20 years for a new recording of

Khachaturian's Second Symphony – dubbed 'Symphony with the Bell' by the Soviet critic Georgiy Khubov – and two come along almost simultaneously. Dmitry Yablonsky's account (recorded in 2006) was finally released by Naxos in April, closely followed by Frank Beermann's Robert-Schumann-Philharmonie recording on CPO, marking the start of a new Khachaturian edition.

The Second was written in 1943 at the Composers' Union retreat in Ivanovo and was described by the composer as 'a requiem of wrath, a requiem of protest against war and violence'. Khachaturian revised it the following year, including switching the inner movements around. It is typical ear-bursting Khachaturian, garish in its orchestration, with brazen brass and the regular rattle of the xylophone. It requires an unbuttoned approach.

While Yablonsky takes the opening movement at a more monumental pace, Beermann smooths Khachaturian's rough edges. The shuddering bell motif at the outset is dark and brooding, but the second movement – a restless *danse macabre* – is too sedate. The third movement's funeral march features a *Dies irae* sweetly intoned by the strings over slinky woodwinds intoning a paraphrase of an Armenian folksong, 'Vorskan akhper', which Khachaturian's mother had sung to him as a child. Beermann moves this along well, although CPO's weighty sound doesn't capture the piano's tolling as clearly as Naxos does for Yablonsky. The finale is grimly determined here, even slower than the composer's own Vienna Philharmonic recording. My favourite recording remains Loris Tjeknavorian's, which is much more urgent, revelling in the gaudy orchestration in wonderfully brash sound.

Beermann completes his disc with three concert arias Khachaturian dedicated to his

wife Nina Makarova, where the voice is used like an orchestral instrument. Julia Bauer manages the Glière-like writing admirably. **Mark Pullinger**

*Symphony No 2 – selected comparisons:*

VPO, Khachaturian (9/90) (DECC) 425 619-2DM  
Armenian PO, Tjeknavorian (6/93) (ASV) CDDCA859  
Russian PO, Yablonsky (NAXO) 8 570436

## Mahler

*Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'*

**Anne Schwanewilms sop** **Olga Borodina** *mez*  
**Munich Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra /**  
**Valery Gergiev**  
Münchner Philharmoniker **F** MPHLO001  
(81' • DDD). Recorded live at the Gasteig,  
Munich, September 15-20, 2015



This is such a bewildering mix of the prosaic, the indifferent and the inconsistent that it is hard to know what Gergiev's view of this piece is. From bar 1 he eschews overstatement, robbing the opening of its seismic drama. The upheavals from cellos and basses sound oddly literal, notes on a page; the tension between them non-existent despite Mahler's having

painstakingly written said tension into the suspenseful tremolando which can and should hold us breathless. All the conductor needs to do is count out the full value of what is there on the page. Even the little *accelerando* through the ascending figure of the third phrase sounds perfunctory when it should portend a quickening of the senses. The sound, too, is rather dry and boxy in these opening pages, immediacy eradicating any sense of the space beyond. Generally I find it rather opaque, with too little hall perspective and a slightly claustrophobic feeling in the big *tutti*.

Gergiev is highly selective about which of Mahler's directives he chooses to follow. The arrival proper of the beautiful second subject is marked to steal in shyly (a favourite directive of Mahler) but Gergiev suggests little or no sense of hopefulness tentatively gleaming through the gloom. Equally the great drama of the development as it hurtles towards that terrifying sequence of battering discords goes for nothing as Gergiev (and he is by no means alone in this) irons out the shocking drop-out that should happen (and only Bernstein manages this) when irresistible momentum switches to *molto pesante* in a heartbeat. *Molto pesante* may not be a tempo marking but it necessitates a dramatic flooring of the

brake pedal – a kind of emergency stop before the precipice.

And what of the beautiful final pages of this first movement, strings wreathed in rosy portamento? Gergiev seems so bent on avoiding sentimentality (good luck with that in Mahler) that he all but refuses to acknowledge its gorgeousness. Similarly the trio section of the third movement, where trumpets in close harmony ease into a kind of nostalgic reverie. Heaven forbid that Gergiev and his players should relax into the moment and give it room to luxuriate. Again, compare the likes of Bernstein or Chailly or Jurowski.

When I saw that the great Olga Borodina had been entrusted with the consoling maternal voice of the 'Urlicht' I fully anticipated that the magic would duly descend. But, sad to say, she is sorely tested through its hard-to-sustain phrases, words almost incidental, pitching at best dubious.

So much of this performance comes across as Mahler by numbers. It is sometimes said that the hugely pictorial fresco that is the finale is more about stage management than performance and those aspects – distant summonses of offstage brass and the band that rushes us to judgement – are well judged here. But I do wonder about a conductor who can fill the silence before his excellent

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brass chorale sounds the *Dies irae* and then rush his way through the momentous fanfares which follow, completely ignoring Mahler's suspensory 'commas' which in themselves tell you how expansive he wants this passage to be. Why?

And so the chorus steals in – suitably heartstopping (if you get this wrong you really cannot be taken seriously), though Anne Schwanewilms doesn't 'separate' heavenwards as seamlessly as one might wish – and Gergiev goes for exultancy on the threshold of redemption. Bernstein, it has to be said, over-eggs the grandeur (incredibly slow) in the ascendancy of the coda but Jurowski conversely conveys uplift as I've never heard it in this piece. His LPO recording is for me a total revelation in so many ways and one I would urge everyone to hear. Enough said about Gergiev. **Edward Seckerson**

*Selected comparison:*

LPO, Jurowski (8/11) (LPO) LPO0054

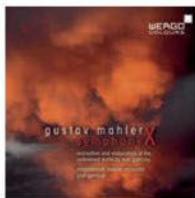
## Mahler

Symphony No 10 (realised by Yoel Gamzou)

**International Mahler Orchestra / Yoel Gamzou**

Wergo Colours (WERT5122-2 (79' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, November 24 & 25, 2011



In the wake of Thomas Dausgaard's remarkably cogent reading of the Deryck Cooke 'performing version' of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, there is a risk that Yoel Gamzou's own more speculative 'realisation and elaboration' (premiered in 2010) will seem merely overwrought. As the young Israeli-American conductor explains in a detailed accompanying essay, he has long felt a special identification with Mahler's not-so-skeletal draft and he makes his case as passionately in print as he does on the podium.

Whether he will persuade older hands is another matter. There's something disingenuous about the way he contextualises his efforts, not even acknowledging Cooke by name, let alone colleagues like the veteran composer-conductor Berthold Goldschmidt. Nor is there a namecheck for Clinton Carpenter, Remo Mazzetti or any of the others who, rightly or wrongly, reject the discreet academicism Gamzou abhors. He is surely correct to say that Mahler would never have countenanced an unaltered reprise in the third movement any more than he would have left the opening *Adagio* in its present state. Then again, does that mean that we should give the green light to a

performing musician's intuitive infilling? The woodwind's klezmerish interpolations from 15'16" may or may not strike you as plausible, given the controversial reading of notes deciphered differently by Krenek and Cooke in the preceding bars.

It is difficult to tell whether Gamzou's insistence on extreme dynamics and abrupt tempo changes is something he wants hard-wired into the score itself: such overstatement would seem to be part of his expressive armoury on the rostrum. The tendency to snatch at detail quickly palls yet some ideas do strike sparks. The first Scherzo is dragged closer to the inner movements of the Ninth Symphony, its idyllic Trio element separated out, decelerated and restyled. The Ninth comes to mind again, plausibly enough, at the very end of the Symphony, where Cooke's horns are replaced by fading strings. I was less convinced by the reworked launch of the fourth movement. Or the opening of the finale, where Gamzou discards Cooke's aptly sepulchral tuba for variegated sonorities majoring on bassoon. A fair amount of untuned percussion is unleashed throughout, often where you'd least expect it. Like Dausgaard, Gamzou has unmuffled thwacks linking the last two movements but the percussive reinforcement for the return of the *Adagio*'s piled-up break-down chord comes only at the very end of that passage.

A rum do, then, albeit with fine sound courtesy of Dabringhaus und Grimm in Berlin's Philharmonie. The playing of Gamzou's own international band is heartfelt, enthusiastic, not invariably tidy.

**David Gutman**

*Selected comparison:*

Seattle SO, Dausgaard (A/16) (SSM) SSM1011

## Maier

'Volume 1'

**Maier Violin Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Piano Quartet<sup>b</sup>**

**Maier/Röntgen Swedish Tunes and Dances<sup>c</sup>**

**Gregory Maytan vn<sup>b</sup> Bernt Lysell va<sup>b</sup> Sara Wijk vc<sup>c</sup>**

**bc Ann-Sofi Klingberg pf<sup>a</sup> Helsingborg Symphony**

**Orchestra / Andreas Stohr**

**dB Productions (DBCD174 (63' • DDD)**



and its aftermath – together with his 'open letter' to Maier – can bring a tear to your eye. Maier was the daughter of a café owner in Landskrona (halfway between Malmö and Helsingborg) who threw everything at her musical success. She didn't disappoint, studying in Leipzig and

winding up in Amsterdam married to Carl Nielsen's chum Julius Röntgen. She died of lung disease shortly after giving birth to their second child; Röntgen was devastated but remarried, only to father another child, naming her Amanda, who subsequently died in infancy too.

Composers including Grieg spoke highly of Amanda's talents. For Vol 1 of dB Productions' Maier traversal, her 'local' symphony orchestra resurrects the surviving movement of the Violin Concerto (1875), a monolithic 17-minute *Allegro risoluto* that owes something structurally to Beethoven's concerto and sonically to Brahms's. There's a stern, upstanding beauty to the music, but there's subtlety too: nice instrumental detail (first horn à la Brahms), long melodies that are distinctive (if not memorable) and notably malleable, and the 'glowing continental sound' referred to by Nilsson and captured in the performance here.

There is further evidence in the Piano Quartet (1891) that Maier rarely took the easy route in her works. But there are cumbersome corners in the piano writing, her transitioning can be uninspired and there are moments – such as the sudden, extended piano flight of the *Andante* that sounds like it might become structural, but doesn't – when you wish she'd pushed further and broken new ground (easy to say, of course).

The simplicity of the *Swedish Tunes and Dances*, co-written with Röntgen, often brings out the best in both. The opening *Moderato* is unmistakably Swedish and even has an Atterberg-style modulation into the minor. Gregory Maytan can struggle with the multiple double-stopping but he plays with consistent style, especially in the last *Allegro*. This whole project has been a labour of love, and it shows, movingly so, from booklet to speakers. **Andrew Mellor**

## Moszkowski

'From Foreign Lands -

Rediscovered Orchestral Works'

Fackeltanz, Op 51. Aus aller Herren Länder, Op 23.

Habanera, Op 65 No 3. Près du berceau, Op 58

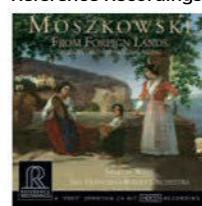
No 3. Six Airs de ballet, Op 56. Gondoliera, Op 41

(orch Otto Langey). Spanische Tänze, Op 12

(orch Philipp Scharwenka & Valentin Frank)<sup>c</sup>

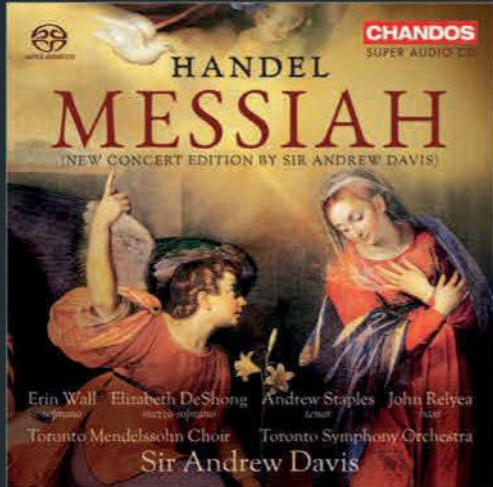
**San Francisco Ballet Orchestra / Martin West**

Reference Recordings (RR138 (73' • DDD)



Why concert promoters and record labels have such trouble with Moszkowski I'll never know, especially his once-celebrated orchestral music. For instance, not a single item from this disc has

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## MOZART PIANO CONCERTOS

**David Threasher** listens to a selection of recent releases of some of the Salzburger's most consistently inspired music



Bringing a 'recreative fantasy' to Mozart: Jean-Efflam Bavouzet continues his concerto cycle for Chandos

Listening to this handful of recordings straight after a series of three BBC Proms that paired Mozart piano concertos with Bruckner symphonies turned out to be a most instructive experience. Listeners may remember that week early in September: on the Monday and Tuesday, Daniel Barenboim was the soloist in the C minor and *Coronation* Concertos, and then conducted Bruckner's Fourth and Sixth Symphonies with the Staatskapelle Berlin. This is music that Barenboim has lived with and cherished for decades, and his touch was sure whether at the keyboard or on the podium – an object lesson in love for this music, whether it be Mozart's quasi-operatic conceptions or Bruckner's translation of a Wagnerian language to the symphonic realm.

Then, on the Wednesday, Christian Thielemann brought the Staatskapelle Dresden for Bruckner's Third, preceded by the so-called *Elvira Madigan* Concerto, K467, in which the soloist was *Gramophone's* Artist of the Year, Daniil Trifonov. While he deserves every accolade for his breathtaking Rachmaninov and Liszt, the Mozart revealed all too painfully a chink in his armour. Following a catastrophic memory-loss shortly before the first-movement cadenza, he began to play harshly, and the orchestral sound roughened in response. The slow movement was too slow and over-indulgent, while the finale was taken at such a lick that runs of semiquavers lost definition and the pulse

became impossible to discern. Trifonov's cadenzas were devoid of sympathy with the era (which isn't to say that cadenzas should always simply ape 18th-century styles) and lacking in any sort of lightness or wit.

Sympathy, lightness and wit are the most important ingredients in the delicate recipe that goes into the performance of Mozart's piano concertos (assuming you take technique as read). All five of the discs under discussion vary the mix to some extent. Perhaps the most remarkable, though, is the one by **Kristian Bezuidenhout**, in which he takes on the 1782 trilogy of K413-415 – Mozart's return to the form after the *Jeunehomme*, K271, of 1777, and the launch of the magnificent string of concertos that would occupy him for the next half-decade.

Bezuidenhout has recorded Mozart's complete solo piano music as well as a couple of later concertos, all well received in these pages and elsewhere, so no question hangs over his sympathy for the style. The thin booklet, however, leaves a couple of matters unresolved. One is the authorship of the cadenzas in K413, presumably Bezuidenhout's own. The other is the identity of the fortepiano, which one assumes is the Paul McNulty copy of an 1805 Walter as used on the pianist's last disc of concertos (1/13). It's a fine-sounding instrument, and adds a percussive bass as Bezuidenhout accompanies the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra's *tutti*s. There's plenty of

interpretative freedom, too, as the soloist takes Mozart's scores as a starting point rather than as the gospel handed down from above: Mozart's piano concertos are famously unfinished in many cases, so some fairly aggressive intervention from an editor or a performer is often required; and even though these three were published, and therefore presumably more 'complete' than, say, the *Coronation* Concerto, the necessity remains for an interpretative 'brain' between the score and the fingers. Mozart encoded his memorial to JC Bach in the slow movement of K414 and Bezuidenhout plays this with a touching simplicity; elsewhere he is superbly responsive to the music's high spirits and to the possibilities inherent in these scores.

There's no query over the cadenzas in **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet**'s disc – the first instalment in what promises to be a concerto cycle with the Manchester Camerata. In fact, the cadenzas are rather the point here. In the oddly neglected K456, he sticks to Mozart's, while for K453 he plays his own. Not only that, but he offers an appendix with Mozart's cadenzas for the sake of completeness, tracked so that you can programme your player to choose and compare. It's a nice idea and there are few pianists with the recreative fantasy that Bavouzet brings to just about everything he plays. His cadenzas throw hefty spoonfuls of individuality into the mix; and while Mozart could never have come up with such inventions (the jazzy excursion in the first movement is a delight), they never feel alien but instead speak of the perfect symbiosis between composer and performer. With beautiful wind solos (as well as moments when the strings are pared down to single voices) and one of those early string divertimentos (K137) as a filler, this is a sheer delight and leaves you wondering which way Bavouzet will turn next in his cycle – and when.

**Haiou Zhang** offers the familiar pairing of the D minor, K466, and its immediate successor, the *Elvira Madigan*. I wasn't keen on the rather faceless, dry piano sound in the former, although it improves in the latter, even if it's still a bit desiccated above the top stave. On the podium is Thomas Fey, taking a break from his alternately compelling and enervating Haydn symphony cycle, and he and Zhang seem a good match in their personal approaches to rubato. The Heidelberg Symphony woodwind play with ample character and acute tuning (especially those oboe octaves as K466's opening *tutti* turns to F major). Zhang and Fey refuse to linger in the famous slow movement of K467, saving

it from becoming sentimental, and they pick an ideal speed in the finale, allowing the passagework not only to coordinate but also to make its point. The cadenzas are unidentified in the booklet: they are the standard Beethoven in K466 and, to make a pleasant change, András Schiff's in K467.

Two more concerto recordings offer perhaps slightly more limited pleasure. **Sophie-Mayuko Vetter** presents the same G major as Bavouzet and the final concerto, K595, along with a couple of fragments completed by others. There are some very good things here – her playing in K453's finale is wonderfully witty – but the opening of K595 never finds its feet and Peter Ruzicka's Hamburg Symphony Orchestra are not on the same level as Gábor Tákacs-Nagy's Manchester Camerata for Bavouzet. The fragments may appeal to completists: a C minor Fantasy elaborated after Mozart's death by Maximilian Stadler and a concerto for piano and violin (with Rainer Kussmaul), one of the many sketches brought to life by the indefatigable Robert Levin.

**Olivier Cavé** displays sensitivity and imagination in a middle-early-late sandwich but it is the orchestral playing here that most catches the ear. We are not told whether the ensemble *Divertissement* play on period or modern instruments under Rinaldo Alessandrini but their sonorities are so redolent of the best of current 'HIP' playing that they command attention, especially in the big, wind-and-brass-dominated orchestration of the C major Concerto, K503. Perhaps Cavé is a little self-effacing but it's the orchestra that seems most imaginative here – and that's surely the wrong way round in a piano concerto. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Mozart** Pf Concs K413-415  
Kristian Bezuidenhout  
Harmonia Mundi  HMC90 2218



**Mozart** Pf Concs K453 & 456  
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet  
Chandos  CHAN10929



**Mozart** Pf Concs K466 & 467  
Haiou Zhang  
Hänssler Classic  HCI6037



**Mozart** Pf Concs K453 & 595, etc  
Sophie-Mayuko Vetter  
Oehms  OCI849



**Mozart** Pf Concs K175, 415 & 503  
Olivier Cavé  
Alpha  ALPHA243

ever featured in the BBC's wide-ranging, inclusive Proms, with the exception of the work that made Moszkowski's fortune, the five *Spanish Dances*, Op 2. These have been played – just once, in 1895. (The *Malagueña* from his 1892 opera *Boabdil*, sadly not included here, was so popular that it was played in every Proms season from 1899 till 1931, sometimes three times in a single year, but never since.) Fashions and Proms directors change. Today it is left almost entirely to pianists – from Hofmann and Horowitz to Hamelin and Hough – to keep his name alive.

So it is a pleasure merely to have the repertoire on this disc with its four world premieres (nine separate pieces lasting 30 minutes). One of these, *Fackeltanz* ('Torch Dance'), is a delightfully turned earworm, as is the *Habanera* (an orchestral version of No 3 from the set of *New Spanish Dances*, Op 65). Hearing these works for the first time, the performances will strike one as really rather good, capturing all the typical charm and rhythmic exuberance of the composer. Yet, when it comes to the more familiar titles, doubts set in – not enough to spoil one's enjoyment, let me underline, but not all the playing is as spirited as it might be. The *Six Airs de ballet* from *Don Juan and Faust* sound a bit rehearse-record to me, while the tempi adopted for the aforementioned Op 12 *Spanish Dances* are enervating compared to Ataúlfo Argenta's classic 1957 recording with the LSO (Decca, 7/57), and also in *From Foreign Lands*, whether it be Antoni Wit with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra (in an airier acoustic – Naxos, 2/99) or the lively Berlin Staatskapelle with Clemens Schmalstich and Armas Järnefelt sharing the podium in 1929 (HMW, 6/31) – before Moszkowski's star had begun to fade. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Penderecki

**Penderecki Conducts Penderecki, Vol 1**  
*Dies illa*<sup>a</sup>. Hymne an den heiligen Adalbert.  
Hymne an den heiligen Daniel. Psalms of David  
<sup>a</sup>**Johanna Rusanen** sop <sup>a</sup>**Agnieszka Rehli** mez  
<sup>a</sup>**Nikolai Didenko** bass **Warsaw Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra / Krzysztof Penderecki**  
Warner Classics  2564 60393-9 (50' • DDD)



This interesting collection of sacred music by Penderecki includes works from various periods of his life. The *Psalms of David*, from 1958, are classic first-period Penderecki, while the two Hymns date from 1997 and the *Dies illa* from a mere two years

ago. As one has come to expect from his recent works, it is the latter that is the most sumptuous. Written to commemorate the victims of the First World War and commissioned by the Flanders Festival, it plunges us into a dramatic world of richly orchestrated neo-Romanticism, positively glowing with musical nostalgia. There is much use of trumpets (as well as the plastic tubaphones that the composer has employed before), illustrating the theme of judgement, and Penderecki follows the text extremely closely, illustrating every nuance (which makes the lack of texts in Warner's booklet the more lamentable).

The *Hymn to St Daniel* and *Hymn to St Adalbert* are very different in both tone and style. The latter is very much more restrained, with an entirely appropriate quasi-liturgical ambience that often suggests the Russian choral tradition of the 19th century. Russia is even more present in the *Hymn to St Daniel*, composed as it was for the 850th anniversary of the foundation of Moscow, and it contains much broad reference to Orthodox choral music. The orchestra is used sparingly but effectively, particularly at the end, which evokes bells.

The pointillistic serialism of the *Psalms of David* is hugely refreshing after the sonic bath of *Dies illa*. It was one of the three works that each won Penderecki a prize in the 1959 Young Composers' Competition organised by the Polish Composer's Union (the other two were *Strophes* and *Emanations*), and its spare, fragmented sound world still impresses today. The singers of the Warsaw Philharmonic Choir would appear to relish the music; and performances throughout are not only outstanding but beautifully recorded. **Ivan Moody**

## Prokofiev

**Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 10; No 3, Op 26; No 4, Op 53**  
**Olli Mustonen** pf  
**Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu**  
Ondine  ODE1244-2 (70' • DDD)



How many times have I regretted a shortage of fantasy, flair and fairy-tale imagination in recordings of the Prokofiev piano concertos? Well, here is a disc that takes all those qualities to the top, gleefully goes over it, and ends up halfway down the other side. I don't want to sound unappreciative, but...

Of course Mustonen is a known property. His ultra-pecky staccato is as familiar as his hide-and-seek antics with textures, semi-randomly highlighting some notes while

reducing others to a behind-the-hand whisper. The range and idiosyncrasies of attacks and colours is dazzling, and often in a good sense. At times this disc feels like Prokofiev reimagined by Chico Marx.

And there's the problem. You might say that Prokofiev asks for it, by his scant regard for the craft of large-scale musical construction, coupled with his genius for thematic invention and for laughing things off rather than psychologising them. But while all this may broadly apply to the apprentice-piece First Concerto, it is only a half-truth so far as the Third Concerto is concerned. Here Mustonen's urge to dazzle obscures other, more shadowy facets that the music has to offer, while to call his succession of tempi in the second movement capricious or wilful would be an understatement. By pushing characterisation so far towards caricature he ends up diminishing the work, or so it seems to me. I suppose the classic Ashkenazy/Previn set is my template for how to get the best of several worlds. As Mustonen minces and tippy-toes through the Fourth Concerto you might find yourself longing for him just to walk or run like a normal human being. Yet here, as with the First Concerto, I find it hard to take offence; the music itself touches fewer and shallower depths, and the application of colour follows lines already implicit in the musical texture.

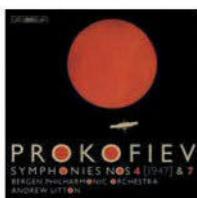
To be clear: none of this is done in order to paper over cracks in technique, and, as a composer himself, Mustonen's agenda can be understood as creative rather than opportunistic. Nor would anyone who has heard Prokofiev's own recordings dare to call his rubato historically unfounded. Most importantly, the super-light, transparent textures Hannu Lintu conjures from the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra are an excellent foil for his soloist. So if there is room in your collection for several sets of the Prokofiev concertos, this one at least comes with a provocative distinctiveness.

**David Fanning**

*Piano Concertos – selected comparison:*  
Ashkenazy, LSO, Previn (10/75<sup>th</sup>) (DECC)  
452 588-2DF2 or 473 259-2DTR3

## Prokofiev

**Symphonies – No 4 (revised version, 1947), Op 112; No 7, Op 131 (two versions of finale)**  
**Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton**  
BIS (F) BIS2134 (82' • DDD/DSD)



Is Valery Gergiev unchallengeable in this repertoire? He may be at something like his best in his recent Mariinsky remakes but if

you're looking for a sonically state-of-the-art option for home listening, Andrew Litton's latest disc arguably trumps them all. A consistently underrated maestro, he gets great results from the orchestra of which he is now conductor laureate after more than a decade at the helm.

Gone are the days when Western commentators would condemn the Fourth's Soviet-era recasting as an ideologically motivated distortion of Prokofiev's leaner original. Paradoxically it was Adrian Boult who directed what seems to have been the world premiere of the 1947 edition in a BBC broadcast. By 1950 the composer was getting few performances at home as a consequence of the renewed cultural clampdown of Stalin's last years. Like Marin Alsop, Litton has conducted this later, grander version extensively in concert, not least a fine rendition at the BBC Proms in 2011. Both Americans shape its discourse with an assurance not readily obtained in rehearse-record sessions. Alsop's softer, string-dominated sonorities work surprisingly well. However, it is Litton, helped by superior sound engineering, who allows detail to register more cleanly. More important, he makes the piece sound purposefully 'symphonic' and, in music twice refashioned by the composer over a 20-year period, that counts for a good deal. Any minor agogic hesitations are perfectly calibrated to make the argument seem much more than a would-be heroic gloss on Parisian source material.

Kirill Karabits is probably Litton's most potent rival in the Seventh, given that Gergiev's massively long-breathed conception takes the music into territory you may or may not wish to explore. While all three interpretations are very fine (Alsop's recording has yet to emerge), the BIS team obtain a more consistently natural, brighter balance from Bergen's Grieg Hall. We are also invited to explore alternative finales: a ninth track offers the *Vivace* with the happy ending Prokofiev appended in the hope of wowing the commissioners. Long heard with final flourish intact, the symphony is now more usually played as originally conceived, reflecting the composer's wishes as conveyed to Mstislav Rostropovich. Yes, track 8's downbeat conclusion is far more affecting, but it is thought-provoking to have a concrete manifestation of the impact of totalitarianism on a supposedly abstract art form. **David Gutman**

*Symphony No 4 – selected comparison:*  
São Paulo SO, Alsop (11/13) (NAXO) 8 573186  
*Symphony No 7 – selected comparison:*  
BSO, Karabits (6/14) (ONYX) ONYX4137  
*Symphonies Nos 4 & 7 – selected comparison:*  
Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (2/16) (MARI) MAR0577

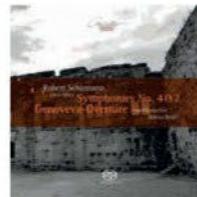
## Schumann

**Symphonies – No 2, Op 61; No 4, Op 120.**

**Genoveva – Overture**

**Cappella Aquileia / Marcus Bosch**

Coviello (F) COV91621 (69' • DDD/DSD)



This disc appears almost simultaneously with Antonio Pappano's very appealing live recordings of the same two symphonies (reviewed in the October issue). It does not, I am afraid, measure up to that disc, nor to Christian Zacharias's pairing, let alone the major cycles of recent years by Dausgaard, Nézet-Séguin, Ticciati, Rattle and Holliger.

The problem is one that was encountered not so long ago in a cycle by Simon Gaudenz and the Odense SO (CPO, 9/15): namely an unwillingness to pull gently against the pulse, subtly easing up as second subjects arrive or textures change. This over-literal, metronomic approach does the music no favours. The sequences of which Schumann was so fond – and which are so important to the structure as well as the melodic unfolding of the music, especially in the Fourth Symphony – are played with a complete avoidance of rhetorical nuance, so they come across as the aural equivalent of a row of Lego bricks, all identical, with even the nobbles on top sanded off.

The Second fares better, at least in its opening movement, as Bosch manages to impart shape and variation to its obsessively repeated rhythmic tic. Cappella Aquileia play decently but audibly tire as the Second progresses. The *Genoveva* Overture features some characterful wind-playing but its presence is unlikely to be sufficient to attract collectors of Schumann recordings away from those mentioned above. **David Thrasher**

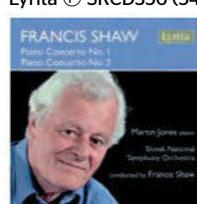
*Symphonies Nos 2 & 4 – coupled as above:*  
Lausanne CO, Zacharias (11/12) (MDG) MDG940 1745-6  
S Cecilia Orch, Pappano (10/16) (ICA) ICAC5139

## Shaw

**Piano Concertos – No 1; No 2**

**Martin Jones pf Slovak National Symphony Orchestra / Francis Shaw**

Lyrita (F) SRCD356 (54' • DDD)



Born in Maidenhead, Berkshire, Francis Shaw has enjoyed a busy career as a composer, teacher and administrator, and celebrates his 75th birthday next year. The

first of his two piano concertos grew out of a commission to mark the tercentenary of Windsor Guildhall and was premiered in May 1988 by Martin Jones and the RPO under the composer in St George's Chapel. Some 25 years later, Shaw subjected the piece to an extensive overhaul: 'It all seemed too abrupt – [with] events passing by too quickly, not allowing the listener to be involved in a more spacious way...'

The revised concerto is as pithy as it is purposeful, employing an uncompromising but by no means intimidating language, and whose outer movements frame a heartfelt 'Slow Blues'. Here the piano writing unfolds (in annotator Robert Matthew-Walker's apt description) 'as if a refraction of a subdued Erroll Garner or Art Tatum improvisation', while the solo trumpet surely acknowledges the haunting slow movement of the Gershwin concerto.

Some 17 years in the making, Shaw's Second Concerto (completed in 2013) again impresses by virtue of its immaculate craft, expert orchestration and poetic sensibility. A rather larger and more patiently argued creation than its bedfellow, it too boasts a middle movement which nods towards a famous example, namely the theme and variations from Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto.

As for the actual performances, Martin Jones emerges as an exemplary champion, and the composer draws a spirited response from his hard-working Bratislava band. The recorded sound is big and bold to match, if not always yielding the last word in refinement. Inquisitive collectors can safely investigate. **Andrew Achenbach**

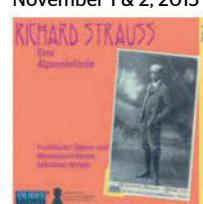
## R Strauss

Eine Alpensinfonie, Op 64

**Frankfurt Opera and Museum Orchestra / Sebastian Weigle**

Oehms (F) OC891 (51' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Alte Oper, Frankfurt, November 1 & 2, 2015



Kent Nagano's recent recording of *Eine Alpensinfonie* (Fara, 9/16) claimed to offer

a considered, unbombastic approach to Strauss's final, grandly symphonic tone-poem. That it did, in some ways, but it's this recording from Sebastian Weigle and his Frankfurt orchestra (usually at home in the pit of the city's opera house, of which Weigle is Music Director) that makes a more persuasive case for such an approach.

Weigle's is not an *Alpine Symphony* in the wide-screen, Technicolor mode but a performance defined by a wonderful lyrical generosity, complete control of the work's 50-minute span and orchestral playing in which every note seems to reflect the drama that is being played out – physical turning metaphysical as the work progresses.

And although this is the fourth volume in a survey of Strauss orchestral music from Weigle and his band, it's informed as much by their performances, also captured by Oehms, of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*: those scores, as products of the 1910s, are closer to *Eine Alpensinfonie* than any of the earlier tone-poems.

We're also reminded that Strauss himself conducted this orchestra in his new work in 1915 (Oehms's booklet reproduces the playbill); you sense it's music that comes naturally to them today.

But while Weigle's approach is more symphonic than cinematic, that's not to say it lacks colour and excitement, even if he fails to grab the attention in the early episodes as much as some – and Oehms's sound, though round and full, lacks a certain brilliance. But once we get through the early scenery, from 'Auf dem Gletscher' (tr 11) on, Weigle keeps a firm, compelling grip that hardly lets up. The Summit offers a

# NEW FROM PROPER MUSIC



**JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH: MAGNIFICAT BWV 243**  
ARION ORCHESTRE BAROQUE  
ALEXANDER WEIMANN, ORGAN AND DIRECTION  
**ATMA CLASSIQUE**

Bach reworked his Magnificat BWV 243a in E-flat major, originally composed in 1723, transposing it up to D major. In this revised version he omitted the four interpolations or Christmas laudes. On this recording directed by Alexander Weimann, Arion performs the version in D major (BWV 243), and reintroduces the four all-too-rarely heard laudes. Arion also performs Kuhnau's cantata Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern (How lovely shines the morning star) to complete this joyful album devoted to Christmas.



**DINA UGORSKAJA**  
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH: WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER **CAVI-MUSIC**

Every morning, when I awoke, I thought to myself that I was about to spend another entire day with Bach – every day the same, but only apparently identical: a prelude and a fugue. And I knew that I was going to devote myself exclusively to that activity, fully concentrated. That discipline gave me a firm grounding, but also directed my gaze upwards. The idea of infinity never seemed as evident to me as when I was working on the WTC. Its intensity carried me through the day.....



**BEN JOHNSTON: STRING QUARTETS NOS. 6, 7 & 8**  
KEPLER QUARTET **NEW WORLD RECORDS**

"A musical landscape which produces music of disarming charm, strange beauty and sometimes dreamlike familiarity." *The New York Times*

"Ben Johnston's string quartets, sonically weird yet beguilingly beautiful, are now recognised as major works in the genre, largely due to the Kepler Quartet's pioneering recordings." *BBC Music*

"... genuinely mind-expanding... There's no artistic or emotional compromise on this disc, and it yields enormous rewards." *Gramophone*



**LAS GUILDE DES MERCENAIRES**  
GIOVANNI BASSANO: RICERCARE PER STRUMENTI INSIEME **L'ENCLADE**

Who was Giovanni Bassano? He was a well-known instrumental virtuoso from late 16th century Venice who performed under Gabrielli and Monteverdi. Bassano was also a composer of ricercars, fantasias and embellished songs, typical of this period, explored in this beautiful new recording from Adrien Mabire and the musicians of Guilde des Mercenaires. Highly recommended.



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nicely rounded vision of contentment, while the subsequent evocations of tension and angst are built up expertly (listen to Weigle turn the screw in the last bars of 'Vision'). The final minutes communicate just the right sort of sublime contentment, too, and I wholeheartedly approve of the principal horn's unapologetic way with the extended solo in 'Ausklang', particularly around the 1'45" mark. Highly recommended.

**Hugo Shirley**

## R Strauss

Ein Heldenleben, Op 40. Macbeth, Op 23

Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Andrés Orozco-Estrada

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 582 (66' • DDD/DSD)



If this is disc is anything to go by, Andrés Orozco-Estrada is a fine

Straussian. He negotiates his way through both of these scores with impressive command, keeping *Ein Heldenleben*'s tendencies towards excess in check. He makes a pretty persuasive case for *Macbeth*, too – even if it remains for me, *pace* Pentatone's frankly poor booklet-note, a problem piece, rooted in a certain literalism and lacking the compelling poetic coherence that would come with *Don Juan* and the subsequent tone-poems.

The Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, as captured by Pentatone (in two different venues: the city's Alte Oper for *Heldenleben* and the Basilika Kloster Eberbach, Eltville, for *Macbeth*) offer a rich, well-upholstered sound, and one smoother than their Frankfurt neighbours on Oehms's new *Alpensinfonie* (see above) – or indeed their earlier disc of the same coupling (Oehms, 2013). Everything's where it should be, and the playing has an easy virtuosity.

*Heldenleben* sets off with terrific swagger, while the love music swells and swoons magnificently, bolstered by some beautifully rounded playing from the horns and a silky corporate string tone. There are times, however, where Orozco-Estrada might have elicited a little more character from his players: from the wind as they evoke the hero's 'works of peace', for example, or even from the somewhat laid-back-sounding companion we get from leader Alejandro Rutkauskas. His final intertwining duet with the horn solo (again, played with gratifyingly full tone) isn't quite as tender and loving as it might be, either. Still, this is a fine, rousing and full-bodied *Heldenleben*.

In some ways the same might be said of the *Macbeth*. But this is a leisurely account of a score in which a lack of sharper edges is more of a problem – and the Eltville venue's more reverberant acoustic doesn't help here, either. It's still impressive on its own terms; but turn to Maazel with the Bavarian RSO to hear what cleaner focus and greater urgency can bring.

**Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparison:*

Bavarian RSO, Maazel (RCA) 88843 01523-2 or (SONY) 88883 79863-2

## Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 44.

Concert Fantasy, Op 56

Eldar Nebolsin p/ New Zealand

Symphony Orchestra / Michael Stern

Naxos (M) 8 573462 (72' • DDD)



If Tchaikovsky became the 'uncrowned composer laureate' of Imperial Russia, as Richard Taruskin so persuasively argues, surely the G major Concerto is one of the pieces that qualified him for the accolade. It is no accident that George Balanchine's 1941 choreographic setting of the work was titled *Ballet Imperial*. Longest of the three piano concertos, elegant, grand and expansive, small wonder that some of the Second's finest recordings (and there have been many: Hough/Vänska, Pletnev/Fedoseyev, Postnikova/Rozhdestvensky and Gilels/Kondrashin among them) run the affective gamut from extrovert to epic-heroic.

Eldar Nebolsin's new recording, in collaboration with Michael Stern, music director of the Kansas City Symphony, here conducting the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, takes a decidedly different approach. In contrast to more stentorian accounts, Nebolsin opts for a reading that is refreshingly mellow, almost intimate and, above all, profoundly lyrical.

Throughout the concerto, as indeed in the alternately playful and wistful *Concert Fantasy*, Nebolsin's unwavering focus is on the shape of the phrase, inflected with the most delicate rubato. Stern and the New Zealanders mirror this rhetorical flexibility with great skill and subtlety. The canon passages between right and left hands, so characteristic of Tchaikovsky, never sound repetitious but emerge as true dialogues. The concerto's second movement, given without Siloti's cuts but observing Tchaikovsky's at the very end, is especially atmospheric. Nebolsin's chordal

accompaniment of the final violin-and-cello duet (9'08") is a gossamer filigree. The finale has a fleet Mendelssohnian or perhaps Litoffian lightness that is quite effective, heightening the overall golden bravura of the concerto.

If the recording has an Achilles heel, it is the distant and perhaps poorly placed microphones, which rob Tchaikovsky's rich orchestral textures of their full brilliance and detail. But if a marred sonic presence places the recording at a disadvantage, Nebolsin's refined and bracingly original readings of the Concerto and Fantasy complement some of the most compelling.

**Patrick Rucker**

## Tchaikovsky

'Complete Works for Violin and Orchestra'

Violin Concerto, Op 35. Souvenir d'un lieu cher, Op 42 (orch Glazunov). Sérénade mélancolique, Op 26. Valse-Scherzo, Op 34

Jennifer Koh vn Odense Symphony

Orchestra / Alexander Vedernikov

Cedille (P) CDR90000 166 (74' • DDD)



This recording completes a circular journey for Jennifer Koh. In 1992 the American violinist was conducted by Alexander Vedernikov in the final round of the very first International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians. In the same year, she debuted with the Odense Symphony Orchestra. Now, all three are united in a recording of Tchaikovsky's complete works for violin and orchestra.

Koh's sound is toasty warm, a golden darkness to her lower register, with lashings of vibrato. Her reading of the Concerto is expansive. Like the river in Winnie-the-Pooh's Hundred Acre Wood, it is grown-up, knows exactly where it's going and is in no particular hurry to get there. It's a comfortable reading to really wallow in. Koh's playing is assured in the *Allegro moderato*, full of romantic yearning, the dynamics in the fiendish cadenza beautifully gradated. The sluggish tempo of the Canzonetta is definitely slower than crotchet=84 – for which Vedernikov must shoulder some of the blame – and many will feel it meanders without any sense of purpose. Although the finale is also slower than usual, it is rhythmically taut, which stops it from sagging. A stately reading, then, without the fire of Vadim Repin, but without the idiosyncrasies of Patricia Kopatchinskaja's perverse account.

This disc's most direct competition comes from Julia Fischer and the splendid



Pianist Olli Mustonen and conductor Hannu Lintu offer Prokofiev of 'provocative distinctiveness' (reviewed on page 39)

Ilya Kaler, who also include the minor *concertante* works. The *Sérénade mélancolique* is gloopy enough without Koh spinning it out further, although her approach is better suited to the *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*, here in Glazunov's syrupy orchestration. To give an idea of Koh's pacing, this disc comes in at six minutes longer than Fischer's, seven more than Kaler's. **Mark Pullinger**

*Violin Concerto – selected comparisons:*

Repin, Kirov Orch, Gergiev (5/03) (PHIL) 473 343-2DH

Kopatchinskaja, MusicAeterna, Currentzis

(2/16) (SONY) 88875 16512-2

*Complete Violin Works – selected comparisons:*

J Fischer, RNO, Kreizberg (4/07) (PENT) PTC5186 095

Kaler, Russian PO, Yablonsky (4/07) (NAXO) 8 557690

## Ustvolskaya · Kancheli · Silvestrov

**Kancheli Sio Silvestrov Four Postludes.**

**Hymn 2001 Ustvolskaya Piano Concerto**

**Elisaveta Blumina pf Stuttgart Chamber**

**Orchestra / Thomas Sanderling**

**Grand Piano** (GP678 (58' • DDD)



When Alexei Lubimov recorded Ustvolskaya's Concerto for piano,

strings and timpani (1946) for a not dissimilar bran tub of shortish *concertante* works from the former Soviet bloc, *Gramophone*'s critic found the selection, then entitled 'Mosaic', underwhelming. Twenty years on, with Marxism-Leninism a memory and the blurring between classical and popular camps far greater, that Erato assortment is still available at bargain price.

Once the Ustvolskaya is out of the way, Elisaveta Blumina's rival miscellany opts for uniformly softer, easier listening. Admittedly there's nothing here quite as lobotomised as Peléci's *Concertino bianco* on the earlier disc, but submission to the market is evident to some degree in all the more recent compositions, two previously unrecorded. Of these, Kancheli's *Sio* for string orchestra, piano and percussion (1998) is the most successful, pastoral and reflective without gloom though lacking the forcefulness of his earlier work. Silvestrov's Four Postludes (2004) prove blander. Also included is that composer's *Hymn 2001*, previously familiar in his own version for piano (ECM, 7/03) but here played by strings alone. Either way, it doesn't seem to belong. Silvestrov once had a truly individual way of coaxing 'postludial'

quasi-tonal magic from the poignant shards of an idiom on the way out. These days he can seem to be content with a mainstream cinematic wistfulness that Thomas Newman can do just as well. Only the smudges confirm that this is 'art'.

All of which throws into relief the starkly uncompromising character of Ustvolskaya's Concerto. Even in 1946, she hammers away at her motifs like Shostakovich stuck in a repeating groove. Her confrontational attitude would never change even as her style evolved in a radical direction incompatible with official Soviet cultural norms. Lubimov's interpretation of a work dedicated to him (albeit decades after its actual composition) is perhaps marginally tighter than Blumina's, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen under Heinrich Schiff again fractionally more assured than Thomas Sanderling's Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra. The latter's performances seem expert nonetheless, the piano tone not inappropriately hardening in Ustvolskaya's more insistent writing. Recommended, should this mixed bag appeal. **David Gutman**

*Ustvolskaya – selected comparison:*

Lubimov, Deutsche Kammerphil Bremen, H Schiff

(8/96<sup>8</sup>) (APEX) 2564 60491-2

# Richard Strauss's Ein Heldenleben

Conductor **Andrés Orozco-Estrada** tells Peter Quantrill how the tone-poem is about life itself

Andrés Orozco-Estrada has done his homework. The water bottles are neatly laid out and so is his score of *Ein Heldenleben*, covered in red, blue and green markings. He is generous with his time on a rare free morning, the most readily frank and enthusiastic of interviewees, having signed off a fortnight previously the final edits of Pentatone's live recording from concerts in March with the Frankfurt RSO.

*Ein Heldenleben* remains for many listeners the composer's 'most controversial work', and not only in the eyes of Strauss scholar Bryan Gilliam. How can such an apparently rampant celebration of egomania be taken seriously? In Orozco-Estrada's response lies a pragmatic humanism that, I suspect, would have struck a chord with the composer. He looks back to an occasion years ago when he conducted it with a youth orchestra in his native Colombia. 'Without knowing anything about Strauss, an audience who hears the title "A Hero's Life" for the first time might think the piece is about a superhero, with a cape or whatever. And it can be good to experience these complex pieces more innocently. I believe it describes not just a hero's life, but life itself. Everyone has it within themselves to do something special. Surviving your ordinary life can be a heroic act in itself. You don't have to be a conductor or a soloist; a normal orchestral musician works in the face of criticism every day, from themselves, from others. You fall in love, you go through battles with people – even parents, friends. In the end, it's a perfect description of the life of a person.'

The technical challenges of Strauss's most ambitious tone-poem he views with a fairly dispassionate, even Straussian equanimity. 'Every section is challenging. It's not so complex to conduct the opening in four, but to get the accents in bar 7, to give the pick-up to horns and bassoons, you need to show the *crescendo*, in one bar you need to show three or four different things without disrupting the pulse. You're an octopus! Or should I reduce my gestures and just let everyone play and enjoy the music?'

Having composed the short score during the summer of 1898, Strauss had to address himself to its orchestration while fulfilling his duties at the Berlin State Opera. This he did with an industry scarcely to be credited: no wonder Strauss's parents told him he was killing himself through overwork. During a fortnight he conducted *Fidelio*, *Rienzi*, *Carmen*, *La muette de Portici* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, mostly without rehearsal, and orchestrated during the mornings.



## The historical view

### *A letter from the composer* Strauss to Romain Rolland, 1899

It's my wife I wanted to show [in the violin solo of the Hero's Beloved]. She is very complex, very feminine, a little perverse, a little coquettish, never like herself, at every minute different from how she had been the moment before.

### *Gramophone* Compton Mackenzie, August 1926

Most of us, I think, will agree that parts of it are not worthwhile, but take these away and you have a singularly strong and in places moving picture of a great man. The recording of such a work presents enormous difficulties.

### *Programme note* Benjamin Zander, 2001

The greatest truth of all is embodied in the final exquisite phrases of *Heldenleben*: that a warm, true heart wedded to noble ideals and shared with another is the highest, most heroic path for human beings.



Orozco-Estrada on *Ein Heldenleben*: 'it's a perfect description of the life of a person'

Could a conductor today face such a schedule? In fact, Orozco-Estrada has been preparing Nicolai's *Il templario* for Salzburg, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* for Grafenegg and *Salomé* for Frankfurt, all for performance within a three-week period. His rejoinder is modest and pragmatic: 'For a great composer, three hours a day is enough to do great things. And look at the videos of him conducting. His movement is almost nothing. I would never compare myself to that level of genius.'

Does the orchestration bear the trace of such industry? 'No, he was by then mature in knowing how to get the colours he wanted. Even in *Macbeth* the style can be heard, how he passes a melody from the double basses to the violas, partially doubling on the cellos.' Strauss does the same with the opening hero's theme, a broad, multi-octave melody of the kind pioneered by Bruckner in the opening of his Seventh Symphony.

Brahms, however, is the more pertinent forebear for what may fruitfully be read as a veiled symphony, or even an enlarged sonata-form structure, if the introduction of the hero, his adversaries and his beloved companion count as the exposition, the battle scene as the development, the 'Works of Peace' as the recapitulation and the 'Retreat from the World and Fulfilment' as the coda. For Orozco-Estrada, the piece 'feels like an arc even if it isn't an ABCBA form – it's so natural and organic'.

By 1898 Strauss had pointedly disowned the Brahmsian heritage of his invaluable experience as right-hand man to Hans von Bülow; but his music and what he said about it were often at subtle variance with each other. Both he and Brahms, following Beethoven, regarded the horn as a heroic instrument. 'Every horn player loves this big opening solo,' observes Orozco-Estrada. 'They want to make it majestic and powerful, but if they try to listen to the cellos, they will always be late. They must not be listening but watching – playing with the eyes not with the ears. It's a weird situation. But I have to say to them, it's only *forte*, don't push the sound too much. And I tried to focus the colour of the sound more on the strings. The hero should arrive normally – his challenges come later.'

*'It has to sound almost out of control. If I did it again, I would risk a slightly faster tempo'* – Andrés Orozco-Estrada

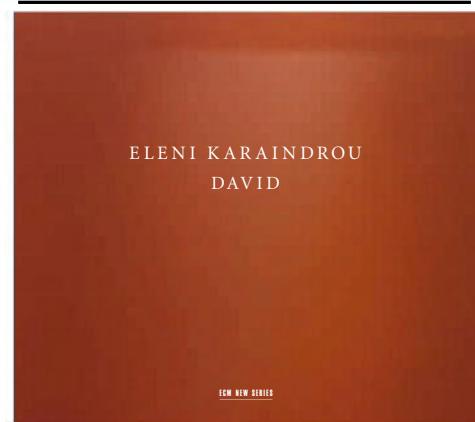
Throughout the wave-like intensification of the first section (and perhaps the entire work), the conductor's greatest challenge is to keep a tight hold of the reins without losing momentum. 'The music is so powerful and so well written that each musician wants to play with their whole sound, all the time. You have to find a good *piano* – which can quickly become *mezzo-forte* if you're not careful.'

The adversaries section is marked 'somewhat slower', and Orozco-Estrada has added 'paranoico' in green. 'It has to sound almost out of control. If I did it again, I would risk a slightly faster tempo – it shouldn't sound comfortable.' In fact, Strauss's markings are economical compared with the scores of his friend and rival Mahler. 'We may not have videos, but from cartoons we can see he was very different to Strauss as a conductor. Strauss's advice to young conductors was don't sweat too much, it's the musicians who should be sweating. Mahler was the opposite. And you can see this in the different conducting styles of Bernstein and Karajan, or Böhm.' Where does Orozco-Estrada place himself on this scale? He laughs: 'Gesturally, I'm more like Bernstein because I don't save anything, I give out lots of energy from the first rehearsal, while trying to be intelligent about it. My aim is to combine a necessary, analytical care – German, perhaps – with a Latino energy.'

Strauss the intellectual is prominent in 'The Hero's Works of Peace', which includes quotations from six earlier works within 12 bars. 'He knew what a genius he was, and like Mozart in his last symphony he wanted to show everyone what he could do. But we all review our lives at various points. At the end of every year I look back: what have I done right? What should I do different next year? And even at the end of each day, like prayer.' The staunch atheist Strauss might baulk at that last word, but listeners and musicians alike must decide for themselves whether to hear the radiant coda as an act of resignation or reconciliation. We look at the expressionistic collapse from around figure 103: 'The dissonant horn chords, the screech in the piccolos, the tremor in the strings – it's the hero's conscience reminding him of all he's done wrong.' But the adversaries are answered one last time by a slow transformation of the companion's solo violin melody, and this gives a clue to Orozco-Estrada's positive answer: 'I interpret it as reconciliation, maybe because I am an optimistic musician. Privately, outside music, less so, but maybe because of that I try to give myself some kind of hope.'

► Read our review of Orozco-Estrada's 'Ein Heldenleben' on page 42

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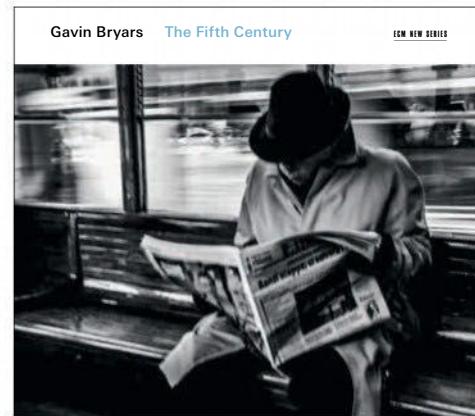
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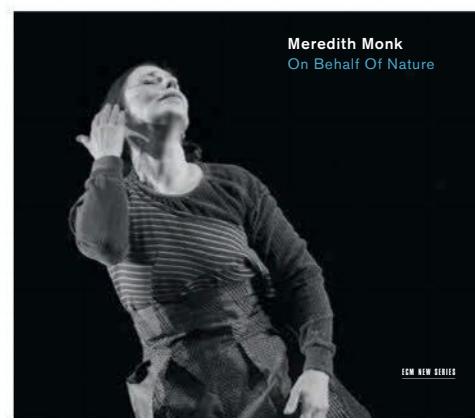
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# Chamber



## Geoffrey Norris on the Fidelio Trio's disc of Ravel and Saint-Saëns:

*'The performance is all of a piece, with the violin and cello speaking with just as much authority and élan'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



## Lindsay Kemp listens to works for two harpsichords by Soler:

*'The enjoyment of the players on this recording is both evident and infectious'*

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**

## Abrahamsen · Sørensen

'Air'

**Abrahamsen** Air. Three Little Nocturnes<sup>a</sup>

**Sørensen** It is Pain Flowing Down Slowly on a White Wall<sup>b</sup>. Sigrids Wiegenlied

**Frode Haltli** accordion

**Arditti Quartet; bTrondheim Soloists**

ECM New Series ④ 481 2802 (44' · DDD)



'Nothing is determined in advance of the music of Hans Abrahamsen and Bent Sørensen,' writes Norwegian accordionist Frode Haltli in the booklet. Really? You can bet your mortgage a Sørensen score will ask its musicians to make sounds using something other than their designated instruments and that the piece won't stray far from his established and highly alluring style (for more on which see Contemporary Composers, 8/16).

In that sense, *It is Pain Flowing Down Slowly on a White Wall* is archetypal Sørensen, from the smudged tonality to the feeling of a slow, inexorable downwards trajectory and, yes, those supplementary instructions: members of the Trondheim Soloists hum before playing harmonicas and eventually leave the stage altogether only for a single violinist to appear behind the audience, engaging the lonely solo accordionist in a final duet. Clearly those spatial elements and stage instructions don't come off nearly as well on a recording; this is a piece that has to be experienced live – and to do so is quite some experience – even if ECM's sound does a remarkable job of getting under Sørensen's sonic skin.

*Sigrid's Lullaby*, originally a piano piece marking the birth of Leif Ove Andsnes's first child, uses a tender tune (built on Sørensen's favoured tonal intervals) embedded within more of those intangible harmonies like disappearing smoke.

Hans Abrahamsen's counterpoint is more eternal and primeval than Sørensen's neo-Baroque calligraphy, and it's fascinating how *Air* for solo accordion appears to

reflect the contrary motion of the instrument's mechanism while still constituting 'music' strong and interesting enough to be rendered on any instrument. But *Three Little Nocturnes* for string quartet and accordion is inseparable from the accordion's gentle wheezing (*Langsam*) and oom-pah-pah folk origins (the deranged fairground that is the *Allegro*). Haltli's playing proves that true sensitivity and restraint are as important on an accordion as they are on a concert grand. **Andrew Mellor**

## Beethoven · Mozart

**Beethoven** Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op 16

**Mozart** Quintet for Piano and Winds, K452

**Die Freitagsakademie**

Winter & Winter ④ 910 219-2 (49' · DDD)



These performances by the Swiss period-instrument ensemble Die Freitagsakademie are so full of character and incident that one can almost overlook the disc's short playing time. To start with, the players convey a strong sense of tonal individuality rather than mellifluous homogeneity.

I often feel that Mozart's instrumental music is at its most affecting when it suggests an operatic scene, and the fact that here one can identify each player as a distinct personality helps to underscore the music's dramatic qualities. In the *Allegro moderato* section of the first movement of K452, for instance, the alternation between plaintive lyricism and strutting bravado could have been taken directly from the pages of *Figaro* or *Don Giovanni*.

Impressive, too, is the way that myriad small details are given expressive import. Listen at 4'05" in the first movement of Beethoven's quintet to how forte pianist Edoardo Torbianelli makes his trills into mischievous flourishes, as well as to the rich variety of articulation and dynamic gradation throughout. Perhaps a few passages in Mozart's sublime *Larghetto* could flow more freely, but in general these

interpretations are notable for their exceptional flexibility. Note, for example, how the sequences starting at 2'17" in the finale are moulded into broad waves that draw the ear gently yet inexorably along.

Both of these works have fared extremely well on recordings, beginning with the now-classic mid-1950s account by Walter Gieseking and members of the Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI). This new version by Die Freitagsakademie offers musical riches to rival the very best, and should delight even those listeners who normally shy away from period instruments. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Beethoven

'Complete Sonatas and Variations for Cello and Piano'

**Gautier Capuçon** vc **Frank Braley** pf

Erato ② 9029 59511-3 (144' · DDD)



With this new release, Gautier Capuçon and his regular pianist Frank Braley enter a field crowded with stellar performances from the great cellists of today, never mind those from earlier eras. But with Beethoven there's always room for one more interpretation, and the quality of this new set is not in doubt. If you find Xavier Phillips and François-Frédéric Guy too prone to extremes or have an antipathy for the McNulty fortepiano played by Robert Levin for Steven Isserlis (personally, I love it), then this recording may well be just the thing. It's more traditional in outlook than either of those, but such is the quality of the musicianship that there are always plenty of fresh insights.

Whereas with Phillips/Guy and Jean-Guihen Queyras/Alexander Melnikov there's a clear sense of the players egging one another on, here the partnership is more one of Classical balance, and the result is by turns poised, polished, intimate and exuberant. Capuçon's lustrous sound is immediately recognisable, and melodies, when they emerge, are sung with palpable



'Full of character and incident' – Swiss ensemble Die Freitagsakademie recording for Winter & Winter

enjoyment. Just sample the *Adagio sostenuto* introduction to Op 5 No 1, by turns confiding, warmly ardent and gracefully skittish; or the brief *Adagio cantabile* of Op 69, which is spacious and touching (Braley the most sensitive of pianists) and segues into the uproarious *Allegro vivo* with complete inevitability in their hands.

The opening of the Second Sonata yields almost as many interpretations as there are recordings. You're aware of the relatively generous acoustic of the new set, which may not be to all tastes. However, the pacing of Capuçon and Braley is entirely natural, their interplay both considered and considerate. But what it lacks, to my mind, are the extremes of, say, Phillips and Guy or the sense of latent menace that the vibrato-free Queyras finds with Melnikov. The Rondo of the same sonata can be a tricky movement to pace. Phillips and Queyras are both fleet, Isserlis slower (but he brings it off). There's just a slightly uncomfortable edge to the similarly steady Capuçon – as if he's more buttoned-up than he wants to be. But if I have caveats about the Second Sonata, that's more than made up for elsewhere.

The Fifth Sonata seems to suit them particularly well, the accentuation in the first movement strong but never bludgeoning. And Braley is ever sensitive, careful never to become overbearing. The moments of

introspection too are conveyed with great beauty. The *Adagio* is faster-paced than Phillips but it allows the musicians to bring a hymnic simplicity to the music that is very winning. As it grows in intensity, Braley really relishes the sonorous writing deep in the piano's bass. And their fugal finale has wit without losing sight of elegance: it's very sophisticated playing. Others may joke around more (Queyras in particular) but there's no doubt the cumulative impact of the Capuçon/Braley approach. Of the variations, they're particularly scintillating in the 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen' set from Mozart's *Magic Flute*, and they find more meat in the 'Conqu'ring Hero' Variations than many of their colleagues.

In the end, how you react to this will depend on your taste in Beethoven. If this new set questions received opinion less dramatically than the versions listed below – all of which draw to a greater or lesser extent on period-instrument thinking – this new set from Capuçon and Braley is undeniably a class act. But if you like your Beethoven a touch more anarchic, then it is Phillips and Guy whom I would recommend above all. **Harriet Smith**

*Selected comparisons – coupled as above:*  
*Isserlis, Levin (2/14) (HYPE) CDA67981/2*  
*Queyras, Melnikov (11/14) (HARM) HMC90 2183/4*  
*Phillips, Guy (1/16) (EVID) EVCD015*

## Biber

**Rosary (Mystery) Sonatas**

**Hélène Schmitt** *vn* **François Guerrier** *claviorganum*

**Massimo Moscardo** *archlute/theorbo* **Francisco**

**Maflalich** *va da gamba* **Jan Krigovsky** *violone*

**Aeolus**  AE10256 (146' • DDD/DSD)



Recordings of Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* have been appearing at a steady rate (once a year on average) over the last 20 years, and this new set from Hélène Schmitt is an intriguing if puzzling addition. Schmitt's continuo line-up is relatively generous but homogeneously constituted: it consists of a theorbo, claviorganum, viola da gamba and violone – not all of them used at the same time. So, like most performers nowadays, she uses a bowed bass on the continuo, despite the absence of evidence for its use in Biber's time. That said, there's little of the chopping and changing within individual sonatas that has characterised (and sometimes marred) other accounts.

Schmitt's reflections on performing the cycle are evocative and informative (and it's worth adding that the accompanying essay by the noted scholar Peter Wollny is equally



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Gautier Capuçon and Frank Braley bring 'plenty of fresh insights' to Beethoven's Sonatas and Variations for Cello and Piano

intriguing, proposing among other things a later date for the set's compilation than has generally been accepted). That said, the tempi chosen throughout are far slower than the norm, in fact slower than any previous recording as far as I can tell. In the concluding Passacaglia this is not so noticeable, but elsewhere Schmitt will linger or pause on individual moments, which further obstructs the flow of the narrative or the individual line. All of this certainly presents the cycle in a different light, though other more concrete details are frankly disconcerting: the articulation of the Gigue for 'The Crowning of Jesus with Thorns' does little to suggest mockery or sarcasm; the metronomic approach to the variation of the set's very last Sarabande has none of the graceful *saltando* familiar from other interpretations; and, in the principal section of the sonata for 'The Resurrection', several bizarre editorial decisions misquote the tune being quoted in the violin part, nullify its imitation with the bass and result in consecutives into the bargain. From an artist of this experience it's very surprising. Above all, one misses the casual overcoming of difficulty, the *sprezzatura* that is the hallmark of so much instrumental music of this period, and with which Biber must surely have captivated his audiences. **Fabrice Fitch**

## Dvořák

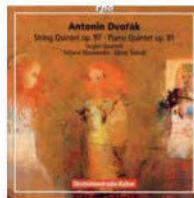
String Quintet No 3, 'American', Op 97 B180<sup>a</sup>.

Piano Quintet No 2, Op 81 B155<sup>b</sup>

**Vogler Quartet** with

<sup>a</sup>**Tatjana Masurenko** va <sup>b</sup>**Oliver Triendl** *pf*

CPO © CPO555 022-2 (73' • DDD)



Listening first time around to pianist Oliver Triendl and the Vogler Quartet in the great Dvořák (second) Piano Quintet I sensed something awry: not technically – they all play exceedingly well – but in terms of energy, which sometimes seems in short supply. The first movement (with repeat) is texturally light and interpretatively unaffected; but turn to Menahem Pressler and the Emerson Quartet and the heat is suddenly switched full on so that the transition from the slow introduction to the fast main body of the movement really goes for the burn. Also, good as Triendl is, Pressler's observance of Dvořák's *espressivo dolce* conveys rather more in the way of tenderness, an important attribute in this big-hearted music.

The opening of the 'Dumka' is similarly bland, whereas Pressler seems that much

more engaged, the Emersons responding to him with a maximum of warmth: this is surely one of their best discs, a truly inspired encounter. The Vogler's Scherzo is excellent – cellist Stephan Forck makes an especially lovely sound – and the finale is suitably mobile without pressing too hard, jaunty but relaxed, which suits the darker elements of the second subject. A good performance, then, but hardly a remarkable one. Either Pressler with the Emersons or Andreas Haefliger with the Takács Quartet would be my first digital choices.

When it comes to the wonderful viola String Quintet in E flat, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Vogler's performance comes at 0'22" (then at 0'45") into the finale, where the second violin carries the principal, jaunty tune, and the first violin and viola offer a slower, harmonically rich accompaniment, a balancing option that you rarely encounter elsewhere. The downside is that the duetting element between first and second violins is somewhat lost. The more pacy Panocha version makes the latter point more vividly. In this context the Quintet's variation third movement is poised and pointed, and the cello well focused by CPO's engineers. But at the final

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The Fidelio Trio perform Saint-Saëns with 'terrific impetus and refinement' for Resonus

reckoning, the Panocha Quartet with viola player Josef Klusoň would still be my first port of call. **Rob Cowan**

*Piano Quintet – selected comparison:*

Emerson Qt, Pressler (9/94) (DG) 439 868-2GH  
Takács Qt, Haefliger (12/99) (DECC) 466 197-2DH

*String Quintet – selected comparison:*

Panocha Qt, Klusoň (SUPR) SU3921-2

## Mozart

Serenade No 10, 'Gran Partita', K361

(arr Schwenke). Die Zauberflöte – Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen

**Ewald Demeyere** *fp* **Dialogues Quartet**

Challenge Classics (F) CC72697  
(52' • DDD/DSD)

## Mozart

Die Entführung aus dem Serail – Harmoniemusik

**La Scintilla dei Fati**

Solo Musica (F) SM244 (59' • DDD)



Here are two different takes on much-loved Mozart scores, both with fair claims to authenticity. One is an arrangement of the

great Serenade for 13 wind instruments for a smaller and more convenient ensemble, the other a *Harmoniemusik* based on numbers from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. The music, of course, is beyond criticism but the reasons for the existence of these versions are rather interesting.

The clarinettist Anton Stadler was probably the commissioner of the *Gran Partita*, as it became known, and most likely gave a copy of the score to one Christian Friedrich Gottlob Schwencke (1767–1822) – who succeeded CPE Bach as Hamburg's *Stadtkantor* – during a concert tour in 1794. Schwencke arranged it as a *Gran Quintetto*, consisting of a oboe quartet and a fortepiano, and thus a very different sound world to the one Mozart conceived.

Schwencke's redistribution of the parts is rather persuasive, and he got around certain problems most ingeniously, to the point of cheekiness: he composed his own Trio II for the second Minuet, which is bound to tweak the nose as well as the ear. Quatuor Dialogues and fortepianist Ewald Demeyere make a decent case for the arrangement, although there are moments of bumpy phrasing from the piano and sometimes the business of coaxing recalcitrant olde instruments into action comes over a touch uncomfortably.

Nevertheless, there's some touching extempore ornamentation throughout, and the *Allegretto* episode in the Romanze is particularly effective.

Mozart complained to his father in 1782 that the commission for a new symphony had come at a bad time, as he had just completed *Die Entführung* and had to arrange it for wind *Harmonie* before someone else got round to it. What we have, then, is presumably Mozart's work (the manuscript is long lost), although other candidates have been suggested. The sheer ingenuity and beguiling sound world of the arrangement, though, speak very much in favour of Mozart's authorship.

It's distilled for pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons with double bass – and, of course, four Turkish percussionists, who are, all the same, used sparingly. La Scintilla dei Fati are the period woodwinds of the Zurich Opera band and play absolutely sublimely, clearly relishing every note. The jingling Johnny jingles gloriously and can't easily be muted, so it jingles on charmingly when stilled. For those who enjoy the rarely trod byways of Mozart's music, this glorious disc comes highly recommended.

**David Thresher**

# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## VIOLIN-AND-PIANO RECITALS

**Richard Bratby** listens to five new recordings of sonatas from the late 19th and 20th centuries, featuring Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky and others



Duo Agineko offer 'a wonderful example of what a duo recital can achieve'

**F**rancis Poulenc didn't like violin sonatas. 'The prima donna violin over an arpeggio piano accompaniment makes me want to vomit,' he wrote to a friend, round about the time that he completed his own solitary essay in the form in 1943. What would he think about his sonata being the first item on a disc by violinist **Irène Duval** and pianist **Pierre-Yves Hodique** that includes both Chausson's *Poème* (in an arrangement by Hodique) and that glorious belle époque warhorse, Fauré's A major Violin Sonata – probably the very work Poulenc had in mind when he decried 'the endless violin-melodic line sonatas written in France in the 19th century'?

Actually, in this context, I suspect he'd have been flattered. Poulenc's Sonata – conceived as a homage to the murdered Lorca – finds its own form and voice: brilliant, bitter, light on its feet. The medium of solo string instrument and piano – inherently more stable than the high-wire act of an unaccompanied string sonata but still more intimate than any other chamber combination – has

a knack of revealing the personality of composer and performers alike, and like all the discs under review here, Duval and Hodique's recital doubles as a self-portrait. From Poulenc it moves through Szymanowski and Chausson towards the Fauré and a final item – Ernst's ingenious 'Grand Caprice' on Schubert's 'Erlkönig' – that nicely points up the sense of musical storytelling that underpins the duo's playing. The acoustic is close and dry (practically linen-cupboard) but one doubts Poulenc would have objected, and it suits these playful, salon-scale performances rather well. Duval and Hodique create a world and draw you in.

It's a striking contrast to a superficially similar programme by the Swedish violinist **Christian Svarfvar** and pianist **Roland Pöntinen**. They begin with the same Fauré sonata, in a sweeping, symphonic reading captured by BIS's engineers in a generous concert-hall acoustic. If Duval and Hodique's performance feels private, this is very public, and Svarfvar and Pöntinen use it as a launching pad for a musical

journey into ever more exotic climes. A tiny *Morceau de lecture* written by Fauré as a Conservatoire sight-reading test becomes a subtle, oddly seductive study in modulation, while Debussy's pungent arrangement of his own 'Minstrels' makes Heifetz's transcription of 'Beau soir' sound positively restrained. Ravel's Sonata closes the disc; and if the playing feels at times almost too poised and glassily perfect, this account certainly captures the sheer strangeness and originality of Ravel's imagination. Pöntinen, in particular, responds with playing of limpid, crystalline beauty.

There seems to be something very personal, too, about the pianist **Susanne Lang**'s advocacy of the Russian émigré composer Yevgeny Gunst (1877–1950). This nicely presented disc features personal reminiscences and photographs alongside unaffected performances of several of Gunst's salon pieces, for which Lang is joined by the violinist **Elena Denisova**. There's nothing here that would have startled Mendelssohn, apart from a solo piano transcription of Gunst's *Symphonie fantastique*, Op 18: 17 minutes of Scriabinesque meandering that reminded me of Tovey's comment on Liszt's *Bergsymphonie*: 'an introduction to an introduction to a connecting link to another introduction'. In rescuing Gunst from oblivion Lang has achieved something admirable, but there's no getting around the fact that his music simply vanishes from the memory with the first, utterly unmistakable notes of the coupling: Debussy's Violin Sonata, in an emphatic if slightly earthbound performance.

Still, there's a warmth about Lang and Denisova's project that I couldn't find in **Aylen Pritchin** and **Lukas Geniušas**'s all-Russian recital on Melodiya. If you still cherish Cold War-era memories of Melodiya as the go-to label for aggressive playing and painfully raw recorded sound, this will bring it all flooding back. Pritchin's violin playing comes across almost as a parody of the 'Russian school': rich and throaty on the lower strings, harsh and wiry up high, with vibrato as wide as the Gulf of Finland. Melodiya's swimming-pool sound quality doesn't help, and piano and violin are alternately too close or too remote. Geniušas makes the best impression, phrasing gently and poetically in Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*. But overall, this is an unpleasant-sounding disc – a pity, because the programme of Stravinsky (suites from *Pulcinella* and

*Le baiser de la fée*), Tchaikovsky and Leonid Desyatnikov's *Winterreise* fantasy *Wie der alte Leiermann*, is imaginatively put together. The most enjoyable item is the encore, in which Pritchin ditches the violin and joins Geniušas at the piano in Desyatnikov's delightfully bizarre *Children's Disco*: imagine Philip Glass at a Young Soviet Pioneer picnic.

It's a relief after that to turn to the odd one out in this collection, a CD of viola sonatas performed by **Duo Agineko**:

viola player Sander Geerts and pianist Yasuko Takahashi. Once again, this is a recital that doubles as a self-portrait. The recording is dedicated to Takahashi's mother, who died in 2011, and everything from the cover artwork to Takahashi's specially written booklet-note is shaped by that personal narrative. The effect is touching, making emotional sense of the musical journey from Vieuxtemps's icing-sugar Romanticism to the desolation of Shostakovich's late Sonata, with Hindemith's Viola Sonata Op 11 No 4 serving as a surprisingly passionate bridge between the two.

These players are unmistakably on the same page, and what lingers here isn't so much their individual qualities – Geerts's mellow tone and tiny, expressive portamentos or the endlessly nuanced shades of black that Takahashi finds in Shostakovich's writing for the left hand – as the way they respond to each other, echoing phrasings, pushing each other forwards and (or so it sounds, anyway) exchanging quick smiles of acknowledgement. A lovely disc, and a wonderful example of what a duo recital can achieve: two players and three composers becoming so much more than the sum of their parts. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



### Various Cpsrs 'Poèmes'

Irène Duval, Pierre-Yves Hodique  
Mirare **F** MIR312



### Debussy, Fauré, Ravel 'Après un rêve'

Christian Svarfvar, Roland Pöntinen  
BIS **F** BIS2183



### Debussy, Gunst 'Wks for Vn & Pf'

Elena Denisova, Susanne Lang  
Oehms **F** OC1842



### Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky 'Wks for Vn & Pf'

Aylen Pritchin, Lukas Geniušas  
Melodiya **F** MELCD100 2442



### Hindemith, Shostakovich 'Vieuxtemps'

Va Sons Duo Agineko  
Etcetera **F** KTC1535

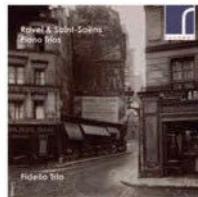
## Ravel · Saint-Saëns

**Ravel Piano Trio**

**Saint-Saëns Piano Trio No 2, Op 92**

**Fidelio Trio**

Resonus **F** RES10173 (60' • DDD)



**G**

The unusual item here is Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Trio of 1892, of which the

Fidelio Trio give a performance of terrific impetus and refinement. It would be all too easy to fall into the trap of inflating the opening movement – by far the longest of the five – since the busy, red-blooded piano accompaniment to the strings' main theme can threaten to take on a life of its own. In terms of texture, though not by any means of thematic substance, Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio, completed in 1882, comes to mind as a score that in realms of instrumental balance requires similarly careful thought. The Fidelio have done their thinking for the Saint-Saëns and the result is superb: you certainly know that the piano is working hard with all those arpeggios and rapid, keyboard-crossing chords, but the performance is all of a piece, with the violin and cello speaking with just as much authority and élan.

The whimsy of the second movement's lopsided 5/8 rhythm is nicely etched in; the cello's languid theme in the central *Andante* is beautifully done and finds a perfect match when the violin joins in. The lighthearted *Grazioso* fourth movement forms an emotional breather before Saint-Saëns returns in the finale to the mood of the opening movement with all his seriousness of craftsmanship and propulsive energy.

The Fidelio's interpretation possesses admirable clarity and definition, polish and brio, qualities they bring also to a very different world of sound in the Ravel Trio. In both works their interpretative touch is secure, their rapport instinctive. Together with their eloquence and passion, this all adds up to something special.

**Geoffrey Norris**

## Schubert

**Piano Trios – No 1, D898; No 2, D929.**

**Notturno, D897**

**Daniel Sepec vn Roel Dieltiens vc Andreas Staier fp**  
Harmonia Mundi **F** HMC90 2233/4 (97' • DDD)



Three leading period instrumentalists play three of the finest chamber works of the

early 19th century, and the disc is a surefire winner. Daniel Sepec plays a 1780 Storioni, Roel Dieltiens a modern copy of a Strad and Andreas Staier a fortepiano based on an 1827 model by Conrad Graf. The sounds they create are delicious: the piano may lack the roar of a Steinway but it certainly has a full-throated bark, while the strings retain their sweetness across the range, and there's a rich 'thrum' to their pizzicato. The two trios are played with sensitivity and wit, and the central *Notturno* – one of Schubert's most touching creations – is a ruffled oasis of calm between its two big brothers.

That's not all. Christopher Clarke's 1996 fortepiano is fitted with five pedals, including one marked 'Fagott' and another 'Janitscharenzug' or 'Janissary bell'. Line up the Scherzando third movement of the big E flat Trio, D929, and you can hear what they do in the A flat section, with bells and bass drum accentuating the *sforzandos* and the bassoon buzzing away like an angry bee. It's Schubert as you've almost certainly never heard it before. (For the record, it's the revised, shortened version of D929's finale that they perform.)

Staier, Sepec and Dieltiens have been playing these works together for six years now, which helps explain the naturalness with which they rise to the high spirits of the B flat and respond to the darker clouds that shade the E flat. Add to that their first-class playing – not only their technical mastery in these stamina-sapping scores but also their cheeky ornamentation and deadpan comic timing – and you have a recording of the trios that's worth returning to again and again.

**David Threasher**

## Shostakovich

**String Quartets – No 5, Op 92;**

**No 8, Op 110; No 11, Op 122. Elégie**

**Debussy Quartet**

Evidence **F** EVCD018 (70' • DDD)



By my reckoning the Quatuor Debussy have now recorded eight of the 15 Shostakovich quartets, and they sound fully at home with the idiom. If their consensus involves a degree of compromise, there is still no doubting the distinction of much of the playing.

*Elégie*, a transcription of Katerina Izmailova's Act 1 aria from *Lady Macbeth* (not Act 3, as per the booklet), is expressive and flowing, if without the degree of heartache that the original setting might

suggest. When Shostakovich quotes from the same opera in the fourth movement of String Quartet No 8, the Debussys' cellist registers the poignancy of the moment, helped by the inwardness of the first violin's preceding rendition of the revolutionary song 'Tormented by Harsh Captivity'.

Those are in many ways the highlights of the new disc. For me, at least, the Eleventh Quartet is a little bland: beautifully textured and blended, to be sure, but lacking compelling identification with the theatre of the bizarre that animates its seven snapshot movements. The violent second movement of the Eighth Quartet lacks nothing in communicative vigour, but by the highest standards it borders on being technically scrappy, while the nuancing of the following *valse macabre* feels a mite self-conscious. I applaud the control brought to the most demanding passages of Quartet No 5 – of which there are many – and there is a touching purity to the finale. What I miss is a sense of outrage, whose object need not be defined (there is certainly a personal agenda here alongside other more arguable existential ones) but which surely dictates something more obsessive and challenging than we are offered here.

David Fanning

## Sibelius

Danses champêtres, Op 106. Four Pieces, Op 78.

Five Pieces, Op 81. Sonatine, Op 80

Carlos Damas vn Anna Tomasik pf

Etcetera Ⓛ KTC1564 (53' • DDD)



These national stereotypes are nothing if not persistent. In direct contrast to the cool, tight, conscientious tone offered by Baiba Skride (Orfeo, 10/16) in Sibelius's Four Pieces, Op 78, the Portuguese violinist Carlos Damas comes at the works with a big, broad sound (especially down low), a prominent vibrato that infiltrates even the shortest of notes and more Catholic fervour than Lutheran sobriety in the 'Religioso'. I love the way Damas digs deep in the 'Rigaudon' so you hear his instrument rattle, but elsewhere the various noises off, squeaks, scrapes and breathing can become wearing.

As can Damas's consistently prominent, in-your-face tone. He sounds determined not to reflect the reticence and detachment of the *Sonatine's* opening *Lento* – fine, but it seems less a point of interpretation and more Damas's general modus operandi.

Surely the ethereal opening to the *Sonatine's* second movement and the coy sign-off of the third need a lower volume, while the first of the five *Danses champêtres* needs more mystery and less obviousness?

The showpiece that forms the first of the Five Pieces, Op 81, is far better suited to Damas's swashbuckling approach; he relishes its virtuosity while pushing and pulling deliciously at the tempo with his pianist Anna Tomasik. There is more of a tendency towards intimacy in the second-movement *Rondino*, but the odd shapes and harmonies of the final *Menuetto* need more clarification and Damas can seem wrong-footed by some of Sibelius's passagework, leading him to rush. A more than capable violinist; but I for one want more exploration and greater sensitivity in these slight works from 1915–24, while an hour in the company of Damas's full-on, slightly fizzy tone can redder the ears.

Andrew Mellor

## Soler

Six Concerti for Two Keyboards

Philippe LeRoy, Jory Vinikour hpds

Delos Ⓛ DE3491 (74' • DDD)



Despite their title, Antonio Soler's *Seis Conciertos de dos órganos obligados* are most definitely works for two harpsichords. All but one made up of a moderate-paced movement of courtly bearing followed by a *Minué* and variations, they were probably composed around 1770 for Soler to play with his evidently talented pupil the Infante Don Gabriel de Borbón, and with their impeccably equal parts, quick interchanges between phrases and numerous opportunities for ornamentation both instructive and competitive, they were surely intended to be great fun to play.

They make pleasant listening too, showing that elegant poise and sometimes dark Spanish colouring in which Soler can even outdo Scarlatti, as well as a good smattering of the fast stuff; No 2, the only three-movement piece here, covers most of these bases, with an opening *Andante* of sensitive melodic profile and rich harmonic turns, and a central *Allegro* that gives the fingers an athletic workout. Some, however, may feel that they have been delighted enough by the time the sixth concerto has come around – and perhaps

only two heads-down harpsichordists would relish every variation and repeat in the minuets.

Still, the enjoyment of the players on this recording is both evident and infectious, with the stereo separation just right for enabling the ear to pick out the musical compliment-sharing. The perfectly matched harpsichords are copies of the kind of Florentine 18th-century instruments that were much in favour in Spain (pity there is no photo of them in the booklet), and combine a pungent sound and plenty of bass with the quick delay and clarity needed to let light into music in which they both play most of the time. Nice and unusual music then, and if it is not likely to change your life, it is hard to imagine it being better done than here.

Lindsay Kemp

## 'French Elegance'

Chausson Andante and Allegro Debussy

Petite Pièce. Première Rhapsodie Gaubert

Fantaisie Saint-Saëns Clarinet Sonata, Op 167

Poulenc Clarinet Sonata Widor Introduction and Rondo, Op 72

Roeland Hendrikx cl Liebrecht Vanbeckevoort pf

Etcetera Ⓛ KTC1550 (67' • DDD)



This disc is aptly titled. In terms of their playing, Belgians Roeland Hendrikx and Liebrecht Vanbeckevoort tackle standards of the French clarinet repertoire with the utmost elegance. Saint-Saëns's 1921 Sonata was a real throwback to the 19th century but is a work of considerable charm, suiting the warm tone of Hendrikx's Yamaha clarinet. The approach to the first movement is far too relaxed for an *Allegretto* but clean articulation impresses in the perky *Allegro animato*, and the showpiece finale, with its rippling scales and arpeggios, is a delight.

Composed barely 40 years later, Francis Poulenc's Clarinet Sonata is a very different beast – pungent, witty and melancholic. Hendrikx performs it decently, with secure top notes, but a greater contrast is required between both moods and dynamics. Michael Collins, who included the Saint-Saëns and Poulenc sonatas in Vol 1 of 'The Lyrical Clarinet' for Chandos, instils more character – and differentiation – into the works, and in much finer sound. The St-Truiden venue is quite resonant and Hendrikx isn't always balanced



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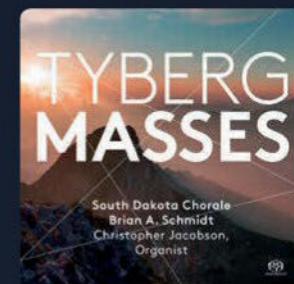
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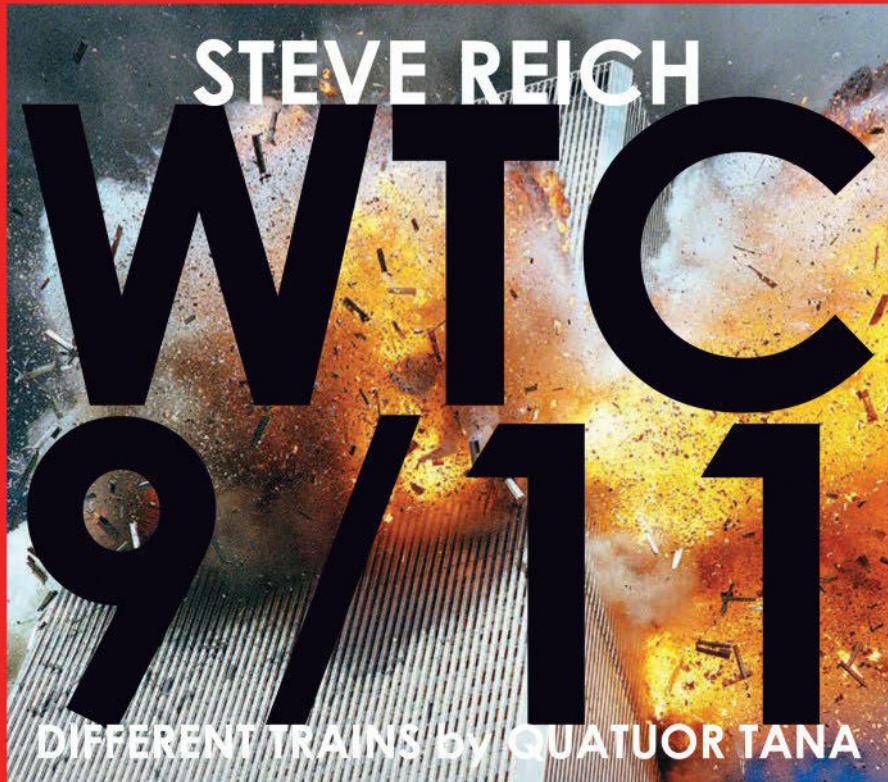
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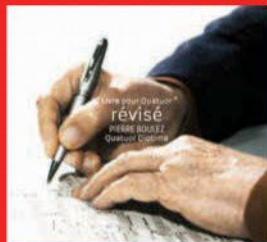
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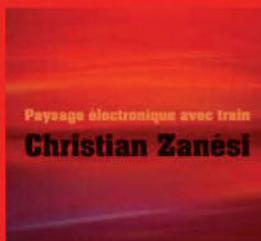
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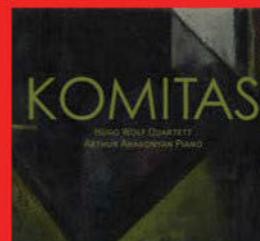
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Tackling the clarinet repertoire with utmost elegance: Roeland Hendrikx and Liebrecht Vanbeckevoort

favourably against Vanbeckevoort's Steinway. This backward placement is also an issue in Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie*, which is a little one-dimensional in terms of drama.

The disc includes a few welcome rarities. Chausson's *Andante and Allegro* (included by Collins on a later disc) deserves to be better known, the technical challenges well met. Widor's *Introduction and Rondo* is of minimal interest but Philippe Gaubert's *Fantaisie* is a real winner (and not to be confused with his *Fantaisie* for flute). Better known as a flautist, Gaubert also taught clarinet at the Paris Conservatoire. Hendrikx and Vanbeckevoort balance its virtuosity with good taste in a lovely rendition.

**Mark Pullinger**

*Poulenc, Saint-Saëns – selected comparison:*

*Collins, McHale (5/11) (CHAN) CHAN10637*

*Chausson – selected comparison:*

*Collins, McHale (8/16) (CHAN) CHAN10901*

## 'Grand Tour'

**Cardew Solo With Accompaniment Krauze One**

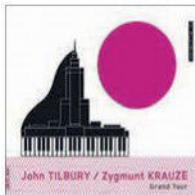
**Piano Eight Hands Riley Keyboard Studies #2**

**Sikorski Echoes II Wolff Tilbury 3**

**John Tilbury, Zygmunt Krauze, Szabolcs**

**Esztényi pfs Hubert Zemler pf/perc**

**Dux (F) DUX1288 (63' • DDD)**



This disc is an unofficial sequel to British pianist John Tilbury's album 'For Tomasz Sikorski', which I reviewed in *Gramophone*'s August 2013 issue. When Tilbury went to Warsaw in 1961 to study with the Polish pianist Zbigniew Drzewiecki, inside his suitcase he had packed scores by the likes of Cornelius Cardew, John Cage, La Monte Young and Morton Feldman, new music that was considered *verboten* in Eastern Europe and access to which gave the Polish modern composition scene a much-needed shot in the arm. 'Grand Tour' was recorded in 2015 when Tilbury returned to Poland to celebrate the legacy of a network of associations that grew up around The Musical Workshop – the new music ensemble Tilbury formed with his Polish colleagues to perform his booty of scores alongside newer, tailor-made compositions.

Cardew's classic *Solo with Accompaniment* and Sikorski's *Echoes II* both put a conscious frame around combinations of sounds that would otherwise merely flirt with the moment. Tilbury has recorded Cardew's 1964 piece before – with the ensemble

Apartment House on Matchless Recordings and with harpist Rhodri Davies and double bassist Michael Duch on the Norwegian +3DB label – and this new version, complementary rather than competing, is exceptionally sensitively heard. The 'solo' piano part, fully notated, provides a skeleton of stabbed notes and bold cadences that the semi-improvised, graphically notated accompaniment fleshes out with largely sustained arcs of sound. Sikorski's piece, written during the same era, has live sounds ricocheting against recorded blasts of piano and percussion; wave-like motions of notched-up intensity that provoke a dialogue as if another real-time solo is working itself out against an elusive accompaniment.

Terry Riley's proto-minimalist *Keyboard Studies #2* made a big impact in 1960s Poland and is played by all three pianists in sync, which generates a ripened tone. Christian Wolff's *Tilbury 3* playfully deconstructs and elongates simple triads, while Zygmunt Krauze's *One Piano Eight Hands* runs stock harmonic sequences on a detuned piano with the pedal held down throughout: a crippled Romanticism blinks through an enveloping cloak of sustained overtones – all the right notes, but existing inside an increasingly alien context.

**Philip Clark**

# Elisabeth Söderström

Andrew Mellor pays tribute to the Swedish soprano whose voice, although not big, had the emotional power to tackle darkly introspective roles such as those created by Janáček

**A**sked by a TV reporter in the late 1980s about her 'responsibilities' as a performer, Elisabeth Söderström (1927-2009) launched immediately into a revealing response. Söderström was concerned, she admitted, for the mental well-being of her audience: 'What we communicate is so emotionally powerful that if it hits someone with an unstable mental condition, well...it can hit them very hard. And you are responsible for that.'

The Swede had more cause to chew over that particular moral quandary than most. Her voice wasn't the biggest, but its dramatic power was unusually acute. That and her extreme physical sensitivity on stage made for a potent combination that delivered poleaxing portrayals of troubled women from Beethoven's *Leonore* to Richard Strauss's *Countess* and, perhaps most notably of all, Janáček's *Kát'a* and *Jenůfa*.

But an icon? True, Söderström was no diva; you could even say she pioneered the sense of 'communal effort' that so many Scandinavian conductors and instrumentalists have explored on British shores since her arrival here. But her legacy on record is indisputable. There is a consistent, magnetic attraction in her voice. More importantly, there are fine gradations of emotional intensity. It's no exaggeration to say that Söderström revealed new psychological depths in almost all the characters she portrayed. She was at it for some time, too, singing well into her sixties (she was almost 55 when her celebrated recording of *Jenůfa* was taped in 1982).

And make no mistake, in one small corner of Sussex and on the eastern side of Gustav Adolfs torg in Stockholm, Söderström's status goes beyond the iconic. For three decades from 1949 she was a company member at the Royal Swedish Opera, where she sucked up repertoire from

*It's no exaggeration to say that Söderström revealed new psychological depths in almost all the characters she portrayed*

Monteverdi (Nero in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*) to Ligeti (Clitoria in the world premiere of *Le Grand Macabre*). In 1957, she was contracted by Glyndebourne to take over a series of roles vacated suddenly by company favourite Sena Jurinac, starting with the Composer in Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. 'We all hated her in advance,' recalled the tenor-turned-administrator John Amis in a Söderström obituary, 'but as soon as she sang the Composer...our hatred turned to love and adoration.'

For chapter and verse on the special relationship with Glyndebourne that ensued, you need only hear the live recording of Söderström's Christine in Strauss's *Intermezzo* from 1974 (Chandos). With her endearing Swenglish, she demonstrates impeccable comic timing and has the mirthful audience in the palm of her hand from first note to last. But here we also encounter Söderström the trooper, willing to throw herself into any situation and give of her best physically as well as artistically (she once broke her knee in a performance of *Jenůfa*, broke her arm portraying Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*, and sang Musetta in *La bohème* while seven months pregnant).

But it was in darker, more complex and introspective roles that Söderström left her indelible mark on the world and with which she most keenly demonstrated that almost dangerous emotional power. Her voice was a good fit for Janáček, with a more rooted than floating tone, rarely weightless yet still able to turn inward or become momentarily secretive (she sang his operas in almost perfect Czech, but also in English, German and Swedish). Her recording of *Jenůfa* with Charles Mackerras underlines her ability to sing with strength while still communicating dramatic fragility. As *Kát'a* her journey from rampant,

## DEFINING MOMENTS

### • 1947 – Professional debut

Makes her professional debut, aged 20, as Mozart's Bastienne at the Drottningholm Court Theatre, Sweden's historical court opera house where she would be Artistic Director from 1993 to 1996

### • 1957 – Start of association with Glyndebourne

Debut at Glyndebourne as the Composer in Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the first of 134 performances at the house with which she would long be associated

### • 1959 – Metropolitan Opera debut

Sings at the New York Met for the first time, as Mozart's Susanna; she would come out of retirement 40 years later to sing the Countess in the Met's production of Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*

### • 1976 – Records Janáček with Mackerras

Records Janáček's *Káta Kabanová* with Charles Mackerras and the Vienna Philharmonic, a scintillatingly claustrophobic vision of the opera and the first of three Janáček recordings with Mackerras that would each win a *Gramophone* award (the others are *Glagolitic Mass* and *Jenůfa*)

### • 1978 – Autobiography published in Swedish

Publishes her autobiography, *I min tonart*, which appears a year later in English translation with the title *In My Own Key*

### • 1997 – Railway engine named after her

Eurostar names one of its locomotives after the singer



'She has the audience in the palm of her hand from first note to last' – Söderström as Christine in Richard Strauss's *Intermezzo*, at Glyndebourne

misplaced hope to out-and-out despair – at times collapsing into introspection, at others punching outwards rhapsodically – seems to cajole Mackerras's wonderfully spiky Vienna Philharmonic. John Warrack put it better than most when he wrote in this magazine that her portrayal establishes Káťa as 'the richest and most human character in the drama...by an infinity of subtle touches and discreet, sensitive singing.' As Emilia Marty in Mackerras's *The Makropulos Case*, Söderström appears aloof and cynical yet still manages to endear with fleeting chinks of human vulnerability. All three recordings are treasures. And there are many more. Bookings at Covent Garden following the Royal

Swedish Opera's tour to London in 1960 brought Söderström into contact with Pierre Boulez, with whom she would record Debussy's *Mélisande* after a production in 1969. In another performance under Boulez – Ravel's *Shéhérazade* captured live by the BBC at the Royal Albert Hall in 1971 and issued just over a decade ago on BBC Legends – we hear how Söderström's chameleon ability to traverse such varied operatic roles infiltrated her transfixing way with song. Her recording of Rachmaninov songs with Vladimir Ashkenazy shows the voice close up; her Decca recording of Sibelius's *Luonnotar* proves that you don't need to be that close to hear the detail in her voice, or to get an idea of the fierce intellect that lay behind it. **G**

#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



**Janáček**  
Káťa Kabanová  
Kniplová, et al  
Vienna St Op  
Chor, Vienna  
Philharmonic /  
Charles Mackerras  
Decca (10/77; 10/89)

# Instrumental



## Jed Distler names Angela Hewitt a highlight of his Goldbergs roundup:

*'The pianist's enviable polyphonic acumen and dance-orientated conception continue to operate at full capacity'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



## Jeremy Nicholas enjoys the latest disc of piano rarities from Husum:

*'Pianists, as much as their audiences, can have a mutually rewarding time going off piste'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**

### Bartók

*Allegro barbaro*, Sz49. *Fourteen Bagatelles*, Op 6 Sz38. *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, Op 20 Sz74. *Mikrokosmos*, Sz107 - Book 5. *Romanian Folk Dances*, Sz56

**Cédric Tiberghien** pf

Hyperion (CD) CDA68133 (74' • DDD)



Fortunately for us at least two very individual young musicians are currently recording Bartók's solo piano music, players who go some way towards approximating the sort of improvisatory approach that the composer himself favoured – or at least that's how it would seem given the evidence of Bartók's own studio and live recordings. The pianists I'm referring to are Andreas Bach (Hänssler Classic) and Cédric Tiberghien. Bach's Bartók series is just one volume short of completion, whereas this is the second Tiberghien Bartók album we've had from Hyperion so far, the first including, among other works, the sixth book of *Mikrokosmos* and *Out of Doors*.

Right from the first track of the CD under review, the first of the *Six Romanian Folk Dances*, you encounter a very original approach, with marked appoggiaturas and a clipped staccato, quite unlike, say, the classic readings by György Sándor (Sony Classical and Vox) or Zoltán Kocsis (Decca). The 14 Bagatelles, Op 6 (1908) – miniature masterpieces all of them, comparable with Prokofiev's *Visions fugitives* – are played with a sensitive touch and much tonal imagination, a high point being the 12th of them, with its slowly accelerating repeated notes and melancholy, cimbalom-style runs towards either the treble or the bass. Bach, who takes a half a minute longer than Tiberghien to cover the same musical territory (5'32" as opposed to Tiberghien's 5'00"), also achieves a sense of profoundly elegiac musing. The relentlessly driving *Allegro barbaro* of 1911 is performed by Tiberghien with considerable freedom and flexibility – not at all the sort of

merciless onslaught we so often hear – and the fifth book of *Mikrokosmos* is characterful enough to counter the music's didactic ground springs. A good sequence to sample would be tracks 32–34.

But for me the disc's highlight is also one of Bartók's greatest works, the *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, music contemporary with *The Miraculous Mandarin* that shares with its orchestral sibling not only an audacious sense of experimentation but a feel for exotic tone colours and tart, folk-like rhythms. Tiberghien homes in on the 'improvisational' element, much as Bach does (and Sándor did before him).

A fine programme overall, then, much to be recommended; but, in addition to Tiberghien and such 'staples' as Kocsis and Sándor (the latter especially on Vox), do keep an ear out for Andreas Bach, a more wilful player, it's true, but someone whose maverick spirit has something unique to teach about this endlessly fascinating music. **Rob Cowan**

### Beethoven • Liszt

*Beethoven Piano Sonata No 21, 'Waldstein'*, Op 53  
*Liszt Consolations*, S172 – No 1; No 2. *Hungarian Rhapsody*, S244 No 6. *Liebestraum*, S541 No 3. *Ouverture zu Tannhäuser* von Richard Wagner, S442. *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, S418

**Sophie Pacini** pf

Warner Classics (CD) 9029 59770-2 (77' • DDD)



Soon to be 25, Sophie Pacini is a prodigious pianist, muscular in a way that suggests she'd be happy to meet any of the boys in her age bracket in tournament, though I'd wager she could play faster and louder than any of them. She tends to 'splash', a word the Schnabel folks used to describe aggressive *fortissimos* that, metaphorically speaking, spill from the keyboard rather than remain contained within the piano's maximum dynamic range. It's a habit counter-indicated in Beethoven, certainly, but

it renders Liszt gauche, uncouth and ultimately deafening to the listener. If Pacini continues to cultivate this repertoire, and one hopes she does, she will realise that both masters achieve their ends by constantly varied dynamics and textures, not by piling *forte* on *forte*.

The *Waldstein* is astonishingly punctilious, every indication of the score scrupulously observed. Yet, when all is said and done, it's as though we've explored a facsimile of the sonata, rather than the piece itself. The most beautiful playing here is in the Liszt miniatures: two of the six *Consolations* and the third *Liebestraum*, all delivered with beguiling simplicity and beautiful sound.

The *Tannhäuser* Overture transcription requires great inner calm and an inerrant focus on the orchestral sonorities held in the mind's ear – think of the performances of Moiseiwitsch or Bolet. Pacini's preoccupation with pianistics early on derails her focus on the music. In the more challenging *Don Juan* Fantasy, the *Commendatore* is a boring old windbag, the 'Là ci darem' variations pedestrian and Giovanni's aria 'Fin ch'han dal vino' fast but flat. At the last minute a not particularly *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 6 darts out of the wings. I can't describe it because, by that time, I was in aural shutdown.

The sound quality is fine; but whoever advised on repertory for this release should be tarred and feathered. Pacini herself is far too gifted to be dismissed. I shall watch with interest as life experience allows her artistry to mature. **Patrick Rucker**

### Chopin

57 *Mazurkas*

**Janusz Olejniczak** pf

Fryderyk Chopin Institute (CD) NIFCCD035/6 (159' • DDD)



Listening to Janusz Olejniczak's two-disc set of *Mazurkas* is like stepping back



'Mozart with a twist' – Fazil Say records the complete Mozart piano sonatas for Warner Classics

in time, to an age when interpretation of this most idiosyncratic corner of Chopin's oeuvre was richly evocative, spontaneously evanescent and, above all, deeply personal. On occasion I was reminded of the insightful conviction Maryla Jonas brought to these dances. Yet Olejniczak's readings are by no means overly indulgent or eccentric, nor do they seem mere reminiscences of old ways and means. Olejniczak doesn't shy from a liberal application of rubato, but it is invariably born of the life of the phrase and never threatens a sure-footed dance pulse. Consistent with the Fryderyk Chopin Institute's 'Real Chopin' series, Olejniczak uses a beautiful, straight-strung 1849 Erard, which the engineers have faithfully captured in all its delicate variety of colour and nuance.

Of so many highlights, the following will perhaps hint at the piquant atmosphere of these performances. The exquisite phrasing so prominent in the Op 6 set is especially evident in the aristocratically restrained No 1. Effusively joyful Mazurkas such as Op 17 No 1, Op 33 No 2 and Op 63 No 1 maintain an irresistible lilt, though the high spirits of Op 24 No 1 are tempered by wistful

nostalgia. The men's stamping dance, Op 41 No 3, is robust and tinged with subtle wit. Devastating tragedy in Op 56 No 3 in C minor is underscored by an ineffable sense of not knowing where to turn. Rhetorical poise lends Op 17 No 2 heart-rending eloquence. The deservedly famous F minor Mazurka, Op 63 No 2, avoids tears in favour of a quiet dignity, despite its pervasive sadness. Embellishments are executed with extraordinary finesse throughout.

As Jeffrey Kallberg reminds us, Chopin wasn't transmitting folk music in the ethnographic sense of Bartók or Kodály but creating what we have come to consider a characteristic Polish sound. The variety of approaches invited by the Mazurkas is evident in two excellent traversals that have appeared recently, those of Dmitri Alexeev and Pavel Kolesnikov. Olejniczak's performances are no less strikingly original and, through his use of a historical instrument, complementary. All three may be considered worthy representatives in a proud tradition that includes Rosenthal, Kocalski, Hofmann and Rubinstein.

**Patrick Rucker**

*Mazurkas – selected comparisons:*

*Alexeev (12/15) (NIFCCD204/5)*  
*Kolesnikov (A/16) (HYPE) CDA68137*

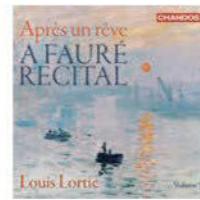
## Fauré

'A Fauré Recital, Vol 1'

Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1 (arr Grainger).  
 Barcarolles – No 5, Op 66; No 6, Op 70; No 7, Op 90. Nocturnes, No 4, Op 36; No 6, Op 63. Pavane, Op 50 (transcr Lortie). Pelléas et Mélisande – Suite (arr Fauré/Cortot). Nine Preludes, Op 103

**Louis Lortie** pf

Chandos  CHAN10915 (75' • DDD)



The French-Canadian pianist Louis Lortie is nothing if not versatile. His

Beethoven sonatas (1/11) demonstrated a thoughtful approach to canonic repertory and a willingness to move beyond received wisdom. He's also that rare pianist whose Chopin and Liszt speak with equal authority and conviction. And when he turns to French music, it's always a treat. Now Chandos brings us another *spécialité de la maison*: the first instalment of a series devoted to Gabriel Fauré.

This lovingly conceived programme begins with Lortie's own transcription of the *Pavane*, capturing the delicate colours and wistful melancholy of the orchestral

original. For some, the disc may seem transcription-heavy, with the composer's own piano versions of *Pelléas*, including a movement transcribed by Cortot, and Percy Grainger's 1939 arrangement of the song 'Après un rêve'. But these are accorded all the care and insight brought to the original works.

Lortie shapes the fluid, expressive lines of the Nocturnes Nos 4 and 6 as though to remind us that Fauré was one of the great masters of the French mélodie. In the more texturally varied Barcarolles, Lortie gives full rein to the composer's harmonic palette without making us wonder where things are going.

The seldom-encountered Nine Preludes (1910) rounding out the disc are of special interest. This series of jewel-like miniatures exhibits characteristics not usually associated with Fauré. The virtuosity of Preludes Nos 2 and 5, for instance, is not far from Rachmaninov, while No 6 is remarkable in its polyphonic rigour. My favorite, however, is No 3, where ambiguity gives way to ecstatic outpouring, here rendered with the utmost refinement of touch.

The Chandos engineers have expertly captured the sound and nuance of Lortie's Fazioli. Long an advocate for a paradigm shift in programming recordings, Lortie avoids the dry lexicographic approach in favour of arranging works with an eye towards contrast and variety of affect. This philosophy, particularly successful here, combined with Lortie's deeply personal yet naturally expressive piano playing, whets the appetite for further releases in the series. **Patrick Rucker**

## Mendelssohn

Six Organ Sonatas, Op 65

**Benjamin Righetti** org

Claves ⑤ 50-1615 (76' • DDD)

Played on the Aloys Mooser organ of the Cathédrale Saint-Nicolas, Fribourg, Switzerland



Mendelssohn's six organ sonatas do not crop up all that often on the same disc. They tend to come as single spines rather than in battalions. With the exception of several individual movements, none has approached public popularity. More fantasias than sonatas, they surely owe something to the composer's legendary skill as an improviser while incorporating German chorale themes and material from earlier works.

I am split down the middle about this disc. Some will prefer the sonatas on an

organ with a dominant diapason chorus. They were, after all, written at the behest of an English publisher at the time of Mendelssohn's visit to the country in 1844 and, though the shadow of Mendelssohn's God is very much in evidence throughout, there is an unmistakable English rather than German something about the music. The organ in the Cathedral of Saint-Nicolas, Fribourg, is reed-heavy with nasal cornets, trombones, trompettes and the like. There is plenty of variety and colour in Benjamin Righetti's choice of registration, and there is never a hint of generalised cathedral rumble in the pedal division (listen to the *Allegro maestoso e vivace* movement from the C minor Second Sonata, probably the best known of Op 65's 20 movements, and it is rather too defined). Personally, I didn't warm to the sound of this instrument or the clear but unflattering acoustic – and Righetti's playing can be just a little staid, though he is certainly fired up in the *Allegro molto* section of the D minor Sixth Sonata's first movement.

In almost every respect I prefer William Whitehead's accounts on the organ of the ballroom in Buckingham Palace, despite offering fewer tonal resources and its occasional tuning defects. His phrasing is more incisive and his tempi are consistently livelier, capturing with greater musical flair and stylistic conviction the essence of these historically important works. **Jeremy Nicholas**

*Selected comparison:*

Whitehead (A/09) (CHAN) CHAN10532

## Mozart

Complete Piano Sonatas

**Fazil Say** pf

Warner Classics ⑤ 2564 69420-6 (6h 14' • DDD)



According to the blurb on the back cover of his Mozart sonata cycle, Fazil Say aims to capture 'a certain naturalness' in his interpretations. That means that the pianist does what comes naturally to him in classical repertoire. He monkeys around with articulations, shocks you with unexpected accents, balances chords in strange ways and brings inner voices (both real and invented) to the fore. If Glenn Gould tore through Mozart like a graffiti artist hell-bent on mayhem, Say's affectations are analogous to animated cartoons. That said, these works generally manage to contain and absorb Say's *affettuoso* style.

Take the *Rondo alla turca*'s exaggerated bass-lines, for example. At first they seem

pointlessly mannered, but by the third or fourth time around, the music's militant subtext hits home. Depending on your perspective, K330's first movement's audaciously ornamented right-hand *cantabiles* are either supported by or chained to Say's tick-tock, disco-beat Alberti bass. By contrast, the 'easy' K545 that all young piano students struggle over transpires normally (relatively speaking), save for a wickedly fast and effective finale.

While Say's tempi don't broach Gould's zany extremes, some of them are abjectly unorthodox. Those expecting a brooding, depth-probing C minor Fantasy, K475, will be surprised at Say's headlong, sometimes unyielding and arguably trivial interpretation. Then the first movement of the C minor Sonata, K457, sternly unfolds at considerably less than the composer's *Molto allegro* directive. Say's broad approach to the opening *Allegro* of the D major, K576, lends uncommon clarity to the embellishments, while the pianist imbues each of the variations in K284's lengthy final movement with a specific character, rather than striving for unified continuity. Here, however, one must contend with outsize feminine endings and jabbing left-hand accents on the repeats. On the other hand, K282's central Menuet, so often taken at a dainty three beats to the bar, gains thrust and profile by virtue of Say's faster, one-beat-to-a-bar conception.

The dynamism of K332's outer movements soars over the proverbial footlights in appropriately operatic fashion, although the slow movement's lyrical calm sometimes falls prey to overdone staccatos. The latter seem to be a speciality of the house, as borne out by K261's *Rondeau*. Say's skittish dry-point traversal of K570's *Allegretto* underlines the music's intrinsic humour in a way that will give purists pause yet might also have elicited a knowing wink from the composer. Say's astute timing and sensitive harmonic pointing enliven the first-movement *Allegro* of the G major, K283, compensating for the pianist's relatively flat, undifferentiated *Presto* finale. Further proof that Say can play simply and directly when he chooses to can be found in his intelligent dynamic scaling of K533's *Rondo*, where he brings out the main theme's music-box sensibility to otherworldly effect.

Say's overall presentation proves equally provocative. He orders each CD according to key signature. Disc 1 features sonatas in A minor, with the four C major sonatas on disc 2. Discs 3, 4 and 5 are respectively given over to F major, D major and B flat major, while the C minor, E flat major and

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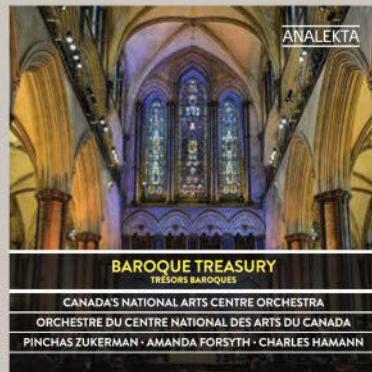
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## GILDED GOLDBERGS

**Jed Distler** listens to five new recordings of Bach's miraculous variations, from first-timers and old hands



Angela Hewitt re-records the Goldberg Variations for Hyperion - this time on a Fazioli

Considering their once-esoteric reputation, Bach's *Goldberg Variations* are more ubiquitous than ever on disc, with more and more recordings flooding the marketplace each month (*Gramophone*'s recent Recording of the Year version from Igor Levit on Sony Classical has, incidentally, just been issued as a single disc). Many of these showcase emerging performers who revel in Bach's boundless invention, wide expressive range and technical challenges, not to mention the work's monumental status and intellectual cachet. Can these keyboard hopefuls find their niche within and meaningfully contribute to the ever-expanding, overpopulated *Goldbergs* catalogue? For that matter, the same question might be put to established *Goldbergs* luminaries, particularly those who have recorded the work with great success, and wish to record it again. And again.

Two young pianists (born in 1991) devote their respective solo CD debuts to the *Goldbergs*. There's much to admire in **Marie Rosa Günter**'s warm sonority, clean technique and penchant for ornamentation. Her reading's myriad virtues include Variation 11's insouciant rhythmic snap, the inner 'swing' of

Var 10's Fughetta and the focused ebullience of Var 14's rapid hand-crossing patterns. Günter's cogent shaping of left-hand lines adds profile to certain canonic variations, notably Vars 3 and 15. Yet her tendency to imbue phrases with slight *tenutos* and odd accents seems less musically motivated than imposed out of expressive obligation, while her dynamic range rarely rises above *mezzo-forte* or dips below *mezzo-piano*. There's no doubting Günter's genuine musicality and instinct for the idiom but these qualities are still ripening.

**Xavier Torres** is a drier, less colourful, more forthright and harder-edged Bach player. An ascetic patina prevails throughout each Aria statement and the slower, lyrical variations, offset, however, by Torres's discreet, strategic-minded rubato. Var 22's elaborate embellishments on the repeats are as ear-catching as his oddly protracted pauses between sections. In the two-manual variations, Torres sometimes navigates the flashy fingerwork with an impressive lightness and control (Var 5, for instance) that does not extend to his comparably proficient yet relatively steely and charmless handling of Vars 20 and 23's dazzling scales and Var 28's

fluttering trills. If the 'B' section of the French Overture, Var 16, is unduly heavy, the swagger and resilience throughout the 'A' section's double-dotted rhythms and flourishes more than compensate. I sympathise with Torres's Bach for its authoritative force, if not necessarily its aesthetic.

The harpsichordist's **Christine Schornsheim**'s 2016 recording attests to her stylish musicianship and effortlessly ambidextrous technique. However, its murky and overly resonant engineering disappoints, especially considering the bright and detailed sound of Schornsheim's earlier 1994 traversal (also on Capriccio). Still, one easily perceives her interpretative evolution: tempo relationships are more assiduous and unified, abetted by a new-found simplicity of expression and refinement of execution, especially in the legato department. Vars 2, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14 and 24 gain appreciable fluidity, while Var 13's energised lyricism is tempered through the use of a lute stop. In addition, ornaments and textural changes are less cluttered and better considered (no filling out Var 29's declamatory octaves with chords this time). Schornsheim prefaces the *Goldbergs* with a marvellous performance of Buxtehude's *La Capricciosa*, a set of 32 variations in G major that is nothing if not a *Goldbergs* prototype.

The *Goldberg Variations* became a signature piece for **Zhu Xiao-Mei** following the success of her 1999 *Mandala* release, later reissued by Mirare. That recording showcases the pianist's contrapuntal clarity, but I take issue with her expressive mannerisms and tendency to slacken the pulse and thicken the sonority in the quicker cross-handed variations. These virtues and drawbacks similarly pertain to Zhu's remake. Granted, there's now more dynamic inflection and less tapering off at cadences, while bass-lines acquire a firmer presence in slow movements. Yet has Zhu's interpretation gained perceptible insight over the years? It's hard to tell when the old habits largely persist. And, for all of Zhu's communicative spirit, sensitivity and genuine involvement with the music, **Angela Hewitt** conveys these qualities with a higher degree of finesse and specificity.

Hewitt's remake for Hyperion deploys her personal Fazioli concert grand. The

instrument's hair-trigger response to note attacks and releases yields complex hues that contrast with the rounder, relatively uniform sonorities of the beautiful Steinway featured on Hewitt's 1999 recording (4/00). More importantly, the pianist's enviable polyphonic acumen and dance-orientated conception continue to operate at full capacity, albeit on a deeper and subtler level, as comparative listening reveals.

As they say, the devil is in the details. For example, Hewitt tosses off Var 5's challenging cross-handed leaps more playfully, tempers Var 6's erstwhile fluctuations with greater expressive economy and allows Var 7's dialogue to flourish. Note, too, her nimbler dispatch of the Fughetta and the canon at the fourth (Var 12). By contrast, Var 19's heightened polyphony and slower tempo impart extra gravitas to the music's quasi-minuet character. Hewitt's octave doublings in Var 29 are grander and heftier, with closer attention to the cascading passagework's bass-lines.

Perhaps differences between Hewitt I and Hewitt II emerge most tellingly in the slower variations, including those three in the minor mode. Var 15 remains brisk and steady as before but the canonic voices now take on sharper focus as Hewitt follows through each line to its final destination. The tender, yielding Var 21 of 1999 contrasts with a new-found urgency. In the celebrated 'Black Pearl', Var 25, Hewitt embarks on an intricate and thoughtful journey; earlier she pursued a less inflected, more direct path. However, the way that Hewitt ravishingly fuses elasticity of line and eloquent proportion in the aria-like Var 13 is worth the price of admission, at any cost. It is piano playing for the ages. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**JS Bach** Goldberg Variations  
Marie Rosa Günter *pf*  
Genuin  GEN16435



**JS Bach** Goldberg Variations  
Xavier Torres *pf*  
IBS Classical  IBS32016



**JS Bach** Goldberg Variations  
Christine Schornsheim *hpd*  
Capriccio  C5286



**JS Bach** Goldberg Variations  
Zhu Xiao-Mei *pf*  
Accentus  ACC30372



**JS Bach** Goldberg Variations  
Angela Hewitt *pf*  
Hyperion  CDA68146

G major stragglers occupy disc 6. Say invents fanciful subtitles for each sonata ('Above the Clouds' for K533, 'Two Sisters' for K330 and so forth), and discusses his personal responses to the sonatas in flowery prose. Some of the pianist's notions are plausible, such as relationship of the E flat Sonata, K282, to Haydn's aesthetic, while others, like the K457 Sonata as a parallel to Goethe's poem 'Erlkönig', read like missives from the bubble. Check out this release if you want Mozart with a twist, but my tried-and-true first choices remain with Klara Würtz, Ingrid Haebler, András Schiff and Maria João Pires. **Jed Distler**

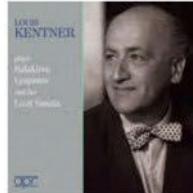
*Piano Sonatas – selected comparisons:*

Pires (DG) 477 5200GB6  
Schiff (DECC/LOND) 443 717-2LC5  
Haebler (DENO) COCQ83689/93  
Würtz (BRIL)  92268 or 94034

## Louis Kentner

**Balakirev** *Islamey*. Mazurka No 6. Piano Sonata.  
**Rêverie** Liszt Piano Sonata, S178 **Lyapunov**  
Douze Etudes d'exécution transcendente, Op 11  
(two recordings of No 1)

**Louis Kentner** *pf*  
APR mono  ② APR6020 (143' • ADD)  
Recorded 1939-49



The Hungarian-naturalised-British pianist Louis (Lajos) Kentner is today probably most frequently associated with Liszt, no doubt because of the several available recordings of his compatriot, as well as his long-term presidency of the (British) Liszt Society. In fact, the only piece not by a Russian composer in APR's interesting, generous retrospective, their third devoted to Kentner, is the Liszt Sonata, recorded in 1948.

Kentner's traversal of the B minor is vast in concept, elegantly masculine and very much to the manner born, with his fine feeling for varied characteristic sonorities evident throughout. The tenderly poetic *Adagio* eschews indulgence and is followed by a fugue that hurtles on at a breathtaking pace. Perhaps most remarkable is the finale, which achieves a grandeur unlike any other performance I know. It's worth recalling that when the Sonata was released in 1951, only a handful of pianists had recorded the work. In terms of scope, if Kentner's compelling reading comes in a relatively close second to Cortot's singular interpretation, it has no truck with Horowitz's virtuosity for its own sake.

Apart from the ubiquitous *Islamey*, most of Balakirev's not insubstantial legacy of piano music remains at the margins of the canonic repertory. Loving care and imagination are lavished on the B flat minor Sonata, a work from the mid-1850s but which had only been published in 1949, the year Kentner recorded it. Both *Rêverie* and Balakirev's sixth and last Mazurka post-date the Sonata by a full half a century. Avoiding salon platitudes, Kentner's readings exude a rich, *fin de siècle* perfume. This *Islamey* may be less dazzling than some more recent recordings, but it is beautifully laid out and thoroughly virtuoso.

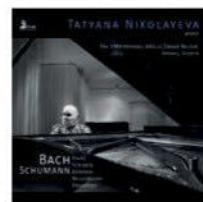
The entire second disc of the set is given over to one of Balakirev's last pupils, Sergey Lyapunov. Kentner's recording of his 12 *Transcendental Etudes* (1905) remains ostensibly the only one of the complete set in the catalogues. Taking their title and inspiration from Liszt, the substance and pianistic means of Lyapunov's Etudes are more akin to Medtner or early Scriabin, without the unmistakable personality of either. Having heard these pieces live in private performances only twice, I find it difficult to make comparisons. What is clear from Kentner's recording is his sincere investment in these pieces, and one feels he makes the strongest possible case for them. Whether his interest and devotion were justified must be left up to the listener.

Credit for the excellent transfers goes to Andrew Hallifax; Jeremy Nicholas supplied the superbly informative booklet-notes. This release comes as another welcome instance of APR's continuing efforts to bring the history of recorded piano playing to our ears. **Patrick Rucker**

## Tatyana Nikolaieva

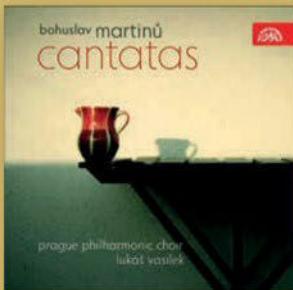
**JS Bach** French Suite No 4, BWV815.  
Musikalisches Opfer, BWV1079 - Ricercar a 3  
**Borodin** Petite Suite - No 1, In the Monastery  
**Mussorgsky** Pictures at an Exhibition - No 5,  
Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks **Prokofiev**  
Prelude, Op 12 No 7 **Ravel** Miroirs - No 2,  
Oiseaux tristes; No 3, Une barque sur l'océan  
**Schumann** Etudes symphoniques, Op 13  
**Scriabin** Poème tragique, Op 34. Prelude and  
Nocturne, Op 9

**Tatyana Nikolaieva** *pf*  
First Hand  FHR46 (79' • DDD)  
Recorded live at the Herodes Atticus Odeon,  
Athens, September 16, 1989



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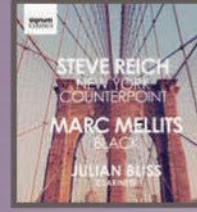


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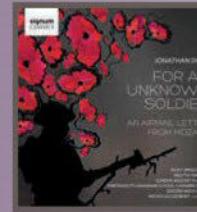


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NICHOLAS CLEOBURY conductor

For An Unknown Soldier is a cantata of remembrance to mark the centenary of the First World War. Commissioned by the London Mozart Players, Jonathan Dove's poignant work combines the words of war poets such as Wilfred Owen, William Noel Hodgson & Isaac Rosenberg.

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Benjamin Grosvenor unveils his latest personal project for Decca (reviewed on page 69)

and you will see on full display the depth of touch, the legato weight-transfer and the shaping of phrases inculcated by the school of Alexander Goldenweiser, which also produced the likes of Lazar Berman, Ginzburg, Feinberg, Bashkirov and my own teacher, Sulamita Aronovsky. In Nikolaieva's case those qualities were allied to a personality of exceptional purity, generosity and creative intelligence, as anyone fortunate enough to have met and conversed with her (as I did) will confirm. Admittedly not every recording showed her at her imperious best, but this one, given in the spectacular outdoor arena of the Herodes Atticus Odeon in Athens four years before her death, certainly does.

If fully projected large-auditorium concert-piano Bach is not your thing, then of course you would need to skip the first eight tracks. Having said that, in its contrapuntal and architectural clarity, the three-part Ricercar from *The Musical Offering* is a model of its kind, and the E flat *French Suite* is simply joyous, thanks to its unfailing energy, perfectly weighted touch and beautifully imagined layering of texture and dynamics. Count the half-dozen or so mis-hits along the way if you will, but surely only an unswervingly anti-big-piano-Bach listener would want to.

It's possible that some recorded performance has matched Nikolaieva's for noble shaping of the theme of Schumann's *Symphonic Studies*. But I have to say that none comes to mind. She stays in the zone for the next half-dozen variations, any passing blemishes being washed aside by passionate identification with Schumann's world of feeling. Perhaps the *fortissimos* here are more mighty than they would need to be in a studio, but as in any top-notch orchestral brass section there is never a suspicion of roughness. Only after the single posthumous variation, placed after Etude No 8, did my mental notes contain a few question marks: for instance over her surprisingly steady and still not entirely comfortable *Presto possibile* Ninth Etude, the degree of fallibility in No 10 and the narrow failure to clinch the high points in the mighty finale. Still, for sheer eloquence, the only live account of the *Symphonic Studies* I can put alongside Nikolaieva's would be Cherkassky's – quite different, of course, in its Puckish playfulness – from his 80th-birthday recital at the Carnegie Hall (Decca, 1/93).

The two movements from *Miroirs* might not be for everyday listening, symphonically projected as they are, but they still left me longing to hear Nikolaieva in the entire set.

Of the shorter items that conclude the recital, the highlights for me are Borodin's proto-Impressionist 'In the Monastery' and the delectably coloured Prokofiev Prelude. Applause overlaps the final cadences of most of the items but is then disconcertingly trimmed. Overall, though, the recording quality is exceptional, sacrificing nothing of the sense of occasion that emanates from the playing. As a first release, this is quite a discovery. **David Fanning**

## 'La famille Forqueray: Portrait(s)' G

**F Couperin** *La Superbe, ou La Forqueray*

**Duphly** *La Forqueray A Forqueray* Prélude non mesuré. Suite (transcr Taylor) **J-B Forqueray**

Première Suite. Cinquième Suite

**Justin Taylor** *hpd*

Alpha F ALPHA247 (79' • DDD)



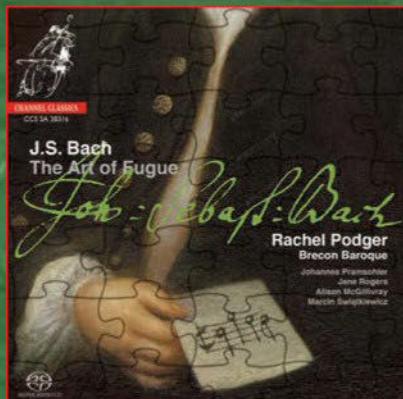
In recent years it has become commonplace to attribute the 1747 Forqueray *Pièces* (issued in two versions – one for bass viol, the other for harpsichord) mainly to the son, Jean-Baptiste, who published after his father Antoine's death. This superbly

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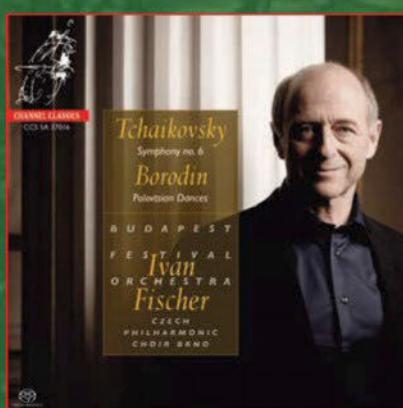


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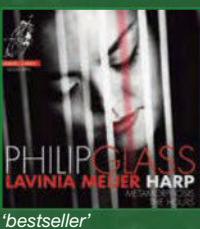
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 Borodin: Polovtsian Dances



Polovtsian Dances as an encore

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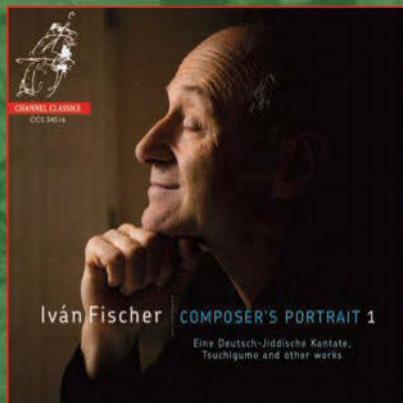
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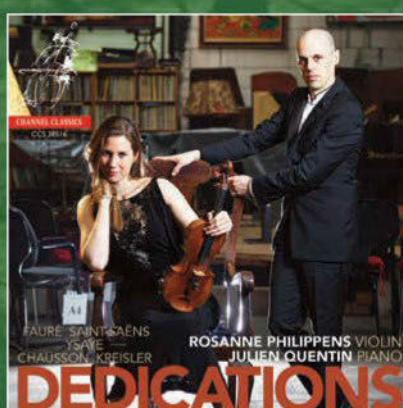
Fischer's debut as composer:  
 all world premier recordings

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The Guardian

CCS 34516

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**Rosanne Philippens**, violin  
 Julien Quentin, piano  
 Dedications  
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CHANNEL CLASSICS

conceived and produced debut recording suggests we should think again.

Even the young, Franco-American harpsichordist Justin Taylor himself attributes the two 1747 suites on this disc – at least in their final form – to Jean-Baptiste Forqueray. Yet Taylor's own polished arrangement of a manuscript three-movement *Suite pour trois violes* by 'Monsieur Forcroy' (an earlier spelling often used to refer to Antoine) – if it is indeed by the father and not the son – bears many of the same musical fingerprints. Within the ingratiating Allemande lurks a popular song. The seductive Courante has such exuberance and momentum that evokes the mercurial Antoine. The piquant harmonic progressions in the poetic Sarabande presage those found in the 1747 suites. Viol scholars think of these pieces as less technically demanding than those of the 1747 collection. Taylor, having carefully studied the latter, has nevertheless ensured that the former are similarly styled. Some might say that, like Jean-Baptiste, he has muddied the waters; others will feel he has realised the music's potential.

The disc opens appropriately with an unpretentious but nevertheless accomplished unmeasured Prelude, also attributed to Antoine, then follows it with a thoughtfully commanding performance of the first 1747 suite. Two aspects of his interpretation stand out: the breathtaking range and subtlety of his rubato and the unexpected slivers of rhetorical silence he deftly inserts. The final movement of the suite, 'La Couperin', is juxtaposed with Couperin's own keyboard portrait of Antoine, though here Taylor respectfully curbs his *inégalité*. Duphly's exquisite homage to Jean-Baptiste (and the 1747 collection) leads on to the Forqueray's monumental Fifth Suite, played with affection and panache.

Winning first prize at the 2015 Musica Antiqua Festival in Bruges enabled Taylor to make this recording, which itself is destined to win him fresh accolades.

**Julie Anne Sadie**

## 'Homages'

**Bach/Busoni** Chaconne **Chopin** Barcarolle, Op 60 **Franck** Prélude, choral et fugue **Liszt** Venezia e Napoli, S162 **Mendelssohn** Preludes and Fugues, Op 35 – No 1; No 5

**Benjamin Grosvenor** pf

Decca  $\mathbb{D}$  483 0255DH (75 • DDD)



There are few young pianists around today to whose latest release one looks

forward as eagerly as one does to Benjamin Grosvenor's. His temperament, taste and technique, along with his choice of repertoire, are a throwback to an earlier generation. This programme is as much a homage to 'old forms' as it is to his pianistic forebears. Having said that, there are elements of 'Homages', apart from a really badly written booklet, that are not entirely successful.

The Bach-Busoni Chaconne provides an impressive and sonorous opening. This, Grosvenor seems to say, is a piano work pure and simple with no hinterland. It's a convincing view but one that means he is not quite as responsive to Busoni's quasi-*organo* figurations (especially in the final pages) as Michelangeli in his 1950 benchmark nor with quite the same textual clarity. Mendelssohn's E minor Prelude and Fugue, a favourite of Jorge Bolet and Shura Cherkassky, is reintroduced to a new generation with a performance of breathtaking beauty while its less familiar F minor companion (No 5 of the set), with its fleet-fingered fugue (*allegro con fuoco*), provides further assurance that one can include Mendelssohn in piano recitals in 2016 without being locked up.

Following this is Franck's *Prélude, choral et fugue*, giving Grosvenor the keyboard colourist a chance to shine, producing the most ravishing *pianissimos* in a magnificent account that can sit alongside Cortot and Hough. Here, though, as in the Chaconne and Liszt's *Venezia e Napoli*, there is a tendency to over-pedal, giving the tone an unusually (for him) washy character, a sound that does not have the burnished quality found on the 'Dances' CD (9/14). In the Tarantella – notwithstanding the astonishingly articulated repeated notes – *martellato* octave passages are blurred, left-hand off-beats lost and note values altered. Here he is outshone by Hamelin (Hyperion, 5/11) and Hofmann (abridged, 1916).

By no means is 'Homages' a disappointment – most of Grosvenor's peers would give their eye teeth to play like this – but, judging him by the standards of his live performances and earlier discs, it falls short of the best we have heard from this outstandingly gifted musician.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## 'Rarities of Piano Music 2015'

**Alkan** Grande Sonate, Op 33 - '40 ans - Un heureux ménage<sup>a</sup> **Craxton** Siciliano and Rigadon<sup>b</sup> **Dobrowen** Poem, Op 3 No 2<sup>c</sup> **Fina** Bumble Boogie<sup>b</sup> **Gustavino** La niña del Río Dulce<sup>d</sup> **Hummel** La bella capricciosa, Op 55<sup>e</sup> **Katsaris** Hommage à Liszt<sup>f</sup> **Mompou** La rue, le guitariste et le vieux cheval<sup>c</sup>. *Impresiones*

intimes - Segreto<sup>b</sup> **Szymanowski** Etude, Op 4

No 1<sup>a</sup> **Zfasman** Fantasy on Themes of

Matvey Blanter<sup>g</sup>

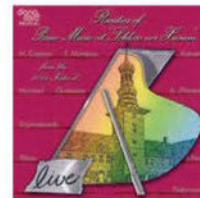
<sup>a</sup>**Yuri Favorin**, <sup>b</sup>**Alex Hassan**, <sup>c</sup>**Martin Jones**,

<sup>d</sup>**Cyprien Katsaris**, <sup>b</sup>**Jonathan Plowright**,

<sup>c</sup>**Jonathan Powell**, <sup>e</sup>**Florian Uhlig** pf

Danacord  $\mathbb{D}$  DACOCD779 (75 • DDD)

Recorded live at Schloss vor Husum, Germany, August 21-29, 2015



The annual Husum disc, issued just before the succeeding year's festival opens, aims to represent every pianist invited to play. Of necessity, therefore, the disc can only accommodate shorter works. This may give the impression to an outsider of a festival devoted to encores and trivia. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yuri Favorin, for instance, is heard in a single movement from his complete performance of Alkan's *Grand Sonate*, Op 33, *Les quatre âges* – very far from a trivial affair – while Cyprien Katsaris's amazing 18-minute improvisation *Hommage à Liszt* (I caught bits of Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Khachaturian and Rachmaninov along the way) was only part of a programme which included his arrangement for solo piano of Liszt's Piano Concerto No 2.

The track brevity of each Husum compilation has, though, at least two advantages, demonstrating that it is quite possible for a disc of recital highlights to be entertaining as well as spiritually nourishing, and that pianists, as much as their audiences, can have a mutually rewarding time going off piste. A Husum recital will generally leave the audience with a smile on its face rather than in a catatonic trance. Try Husum favourite Jonathan Plowright in Harold Craxton's charming pastiche *Siciliano and Rigadon* (not a typo but the English spelling), Mompou's graceful 'Segreto' (from his first published collection, *Impresiones intimes*) and, in the disc's final item, Jack Fina's *Bumble Boogie*. It brought the house down and – NB pianists everywhere! – an invitation to return the following year.

A few of the pieces here are less interesting than others, an inevitable consequence of Husum's adventurous programming and cavalier spirit of curiosity. But the greater part of the disc, like the majority of Husum recitals (all of which, incidentally, have been preserved since 1987 complete – a unique legacy for future generations, should a generous sponsor emerge to allow them to be heard) is a treasure chest of forgotten or unknown gems. **Jeremy Nicholas**

# Jonathan Dove

Dove's idiom, couched in a tonal harmonic language, is capable of both opulence and simplicity, and is embraced by performers and audiences alike, says **Malcolm Riley**

**A**lthough it has not been particularly well served by the major record labels, the music of the English composer Jonathan Dove (b 1959) has enjoyed deservedly widespread critical coverage and currency over the past 20 or so years. Blessed with a great creative fecundity, he has produced music in a wide variety of genres, including – earlier in his career – scores for film and television and incidental music for the theatre (Almeida, the National Theatre and RSC in this country and the New York Shakespeare Festival across the Atlantic). There's a large and important corpus of choral and vocal music, while major symphonic and *concertante* works include *Gaia Theory* for orchestra of 2014 and the substantial *Stargazer* trombone concerto of 2001. Purely instrumental titles are fewer. He has featured in two Last Nights of the BBC Proms, in 2010 (*A Song of Joys*) and again in 2016, with a revised version of *Our Revels Now Are Ended*, his powerful Shakespeare 'dreamscape' for baritone, chorus and orchestra, and a natural companion piece to Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*, which was in the same programme. Dove was also the focus of a major feature by Andrew McGregor on BBC Radio 3's *Summer Record Review* in September this year, which further enhanced an already high profile.

*'Dove clearly belongs to a long line of socially-aware composers whose music satisfies performer and listener alike'*

However, he is best known for a remarkable and highly successful series of operas, over 25 in number, starting notably with *Siren Song* (1994) and then the breakthrough airport comedy *Flight* (a 1998 Glyndebourne Touring Opera commission, productions of which have subsequently encircled the globe). 'I've always had a special place in my heart for *Flight*', Dove has said in interview, 'as it was the first main-house opera I wrote with a full professional company, orchestra and ensemble cast. It opened doors – everything else that followed was laid on by that piece.' More recently he had a great success with *The Monster in the Maze*, which was premiered by Simon Rattle in Berlin in June 2015. He is currently working on a comic opera about Karl Marx!

Born into a creative and artistic family (both parents being architects), Dove was blessed with a natural sense of the dramatic. As a child he was absorbed in the construction of toy theatres of increasing complexity, and by the age of 12 he was playing the organ at his local parish church in London. After leaving Cambridge University (where he studied composition with Robin Holloway), Dove worked as a freelance accompanist, animateur, arranger and répétiteur, roles which constituted an invaluable and formative apprenticeship. As a result he knows what makes singers tick, whether professional operatic voices or enthusiastic, talented

amateurs. He also understands the importance of music as a cohesive force for good: witness the 1999 church opera *Tobias and the Angel*, which one reviewer described as '*Fiddler on the Roof* meets *Turn of the Screw*', while another complained that 'the score is a hostage of its own cleverness'. This was followed, two years later, by the community-inspired *The Hackney Chronicles*. In addition to creating strong, lasting music, Dove has a particular expertise in scoring for chamber ensembles, having produced heavily-reduced orchestrations of several classic operas, including *The Ring*.

In many of these respects Dove has before him the example of Britten, whom he cites as a major influence. And in several ways he is Britten's natural successor, having had the experience of serving a term as artistic director of the Spitalfields Festival, although he has not (to my knowledge) undergone a neo-Purcellian stylistic epiphany, nor succumbed to the all-pervading vocal mannerisms of a Peter Pears! Dove clearly belongs to a long line of industrious, socially-aware composers whose music satisfies performer and listener alike, a line running from Holst and Vaughan Williams of yesteryear (including Thaxted, Morley College, Dorking and Leith Hill Festival) to Judith Weir, Bob Chilcott, James Macmillan and Gabriel Jackson of our own age.

As a performer I first came across Dove's choral music as part of the audience at a University Carol Service, some seven years ago, when we were encouraged to join in his multi-layered *Run, Shepherds, Run*. I was immediately infected by this joyous piece, which was accessible, challenging and annoyingly memorable. A subsequent deeper exploration of Dove's work has tended to centre on the choral music, most of which – happily – is available on excellent commercial recordings. Although we should not label him a derivative composer, there are powerful resonances: Kenneth Leighton springs to mind at his most dissonant moments, while John Tavener's particular brand of 'floating ecstasy' sometimes comes into focus. American influences are reflected in the sheer immediacy of his orchestral writing (especially John Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, and the opening section of *Harmonium*, as well as the despairing weight of *The Wound-Dresser*). Dove's scoring (both *a cappella* and with instruments) is always fresh and colourful, while the clarity of words and the coherence of their meaning are never sacrificed at the altar of artifice. His idiom is consistently attractive, clothed within a tonal harmonic language, sometimes achingly beautiful, capable of Puccinian opulence or a tunefulness of

## DOVE FACTS

**Born** London in 1959; both parents are architects

**Studied** University of Cambridge with Robin Holloway; professional training at Glyndebourne

**Breakthrough** The opera *Flight* (1998), composed for Glyndebourne Touring Opera and inspired by the true-life plight of an Iranian refugee at Charles de Gaulle airport.

**Prizes** RPS Music Award 2005, Ivor Novello Classical Music Award 2008



'In several ways Britten's natural successor': Jonathan Dove is prolific in many genres and writes successfully for both professional and amateur musicians

beguiling simplicity, such as in the folksy *My Love is Mine* for unaccompanied mezzo soprano (1997).

With the 24-minute long cycle *The Passing of the Year* for double chorus and piano (2000) he has refreshed a neglected genre, and our art song practitioners have also surely welcomed his four major song cycles. Additionally there have been many cathedral and collegiate choirs keen to commission sacred pieces, the most notable results of this being an intense, concise *Missa brevis*, first heard in Wells Cathedral in 2009 and the (now) classic carol *The Three Kings*, a King's College, Cambridge commission from 2000 which sets Dorothy L Sayers's poem.

My favourite choral piece by Dove (to date) is his 50-minute oratorio *There Was A Child*, a deeply-moving memorial to Robert Van Allan, son of the British operatic bass, Richard. This has, fortunately, been released on a first-rate live recording with CBSO forces under Simon Halsey on Signum. With its parts for children's chorus, I like to think of it as Dove's *St Nicolas*. The most instantly appealing movement is a setting of Keats's *A Song About Myself*, 'There was a naughty boy'. It's worthy of Tim Minchin!

The good news is that Dove continues to compose exciting and fresh music for our youngsters. How lucky they are to have a new set of 12 songs commissioned by Aldeburgh Music with words by Dove's regular librettist, Alasdair Middleton, for the Friday Afternoons Singing Project which hits its stride this autumn.

Let us hope that more of Dove's major choral works and operas can also be recorded, in particular the *Psalms for Leo*, a Bach Choir commission of 2014 and *A Brief History of Creation* (premiered by the Hallé in June 2016). His musical output is

so consistently engaging and innovative and his judgment so unerringly strong that discerning listeners will gain greatly from further investigation. **G**

*Twelve new songs written by Jonathan Dove with lyrics by Alasdair Middleton will be performed across the country for Aldeburgh Music's Friday Afternoons 'Big Sing' on November 18; visit [fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk](http://fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk)*

## JONATHAN DOVE ON RECORD

Three albums which showcase Dove's choral expertise



### The Passing of the Year

Christian Cromer; Convivium Singers / Neil Ferris  
Naxos (6/12)

A wide-ranging survey of Dove's shorter secular choral works, including the title work written in memory of his mother, Deirdre.



### Choral Music

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Singing of the highest order, perfect intonation, stunning organ accompaniments: outstanding performances of highly-polished choral jewels.



### There Was A Child

Soloists; CBSO choruses; CBSO / Simon Halsey  
Signum (11/12)

A choral masterpiece which deserves the widest currency: a heartfelt, uplifting and entrancing journey with an epic Walt Whitman finale.

# Vocal



Malcolm Riley enjoys a new disc of music by composer Gabriel Jackson: 'Jackson continues to produce sacred choral music of the highest invention, responding to commissions with panache' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



Alexandra Coghlan on the first release from the Globe Music label: 'Yang reinvents herself throughout – now a troubadour, now a folk musician, now a concert-hall soloist' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**

## JS Bach

Christmas Oratorio, BWV248

**Mary Bevan, Joanne Lunn** sop **Clare Wilkinson, Ciara Hendrick** mezz **Nicholas Mulroy, Thomas Hobbs** tens **Matthew Brook, Konstantin Wolff** bass-bars **Dunedin Consort / John Butt**

Linn M ② CKD499 (141' • DDD • T/t)



The *Christmas Oratorio* has proved strangely resistant to the theories of recent

decades concerning Bach's performing forces. The only previous recording to have adopted the 'one-to-a-part' approach proposed in the early 1980s by Joshua Rifkin seems to be Philip Pickett's (Decca, 5/00), and in the meantime 'choral' performances have carried on very nicely thank you. John Butt, of course, has already charmed us with one-to-a-part recordings of Bach's Passions, the B minor Mass and the *Magnificat*, although the term is slightly misleading; while based around a solo-voice group, choruses often employ doubling singers to take them up to two voices per part. For the *Christmas Oratorio* Butt uses sometimes eight voices and sometimes four in the cantatas of the cycle involving trumpets and drums (Nos 1, 3 and 6), and four throughout in the cantatas that don't (Nos 2, 4 and 5). Extra interest comes from the fact that each of the two groups uses a completely different team of singers.

Common to all Butt's Bach is an irresistible brightness and freshness, a clarity that fascinates the ear with internal detail, and a glowing sound – here, for instance, the trumpets are thrillingly bright while still perfectly assimilated into the balance. The smaller forces also allow a flexibility of phrasing and textual emphasis that Butt is happy to exploit, as well as a lightness over the ground that enables him to keep strong momentum without ever seriously rushing a single tempo. Some may wish for a touch more rhetorical timing here and there, yet in the pacing of the opening chorus or Part 2's pastoral

Sinfonia, the faultless step though numbers such as 'Herr, dein Mittleid' and 'Schliesse, mein Herze' or the excited acceleration of the recitative into the Shepherds' Chorus in Part 3, Butt's judgement is generally spot-on and serves the music rather than him.

The singer teams show plenty of Bachian expertise. Though the chorales somehow suffer a loss of energy, the more complex choruses sound glorious (the swirling angels of 'Ehre sei Gott' somehow gain in headiness from single voices), and there is a comforting pleasure to be had from hearing recognisable individual voices within. Nicholas Mulroy and Thomas Hobbs both make assured and communicative Evangelists (the former slightly more dramatic, the latter slightly more lyrical), and only Clare Wilkinson's oddly confidential 'Bereite dich, Zion' seems to take a wrong stance. Mary Bevan is a singer to watch, and newcomer Ciara Hendrick has an impressive tone which we can hope will acquire more lyrical strength. No doubt about it, though; like last year's *Magnificat* disc (12/15), this latest gift from the Dunedin Consort is one go under the tree. **Lindsay Kemp**

## Falla • Lorca

'Encuentro'

**Falla Siete Canciones populares españolas<sup>a</sup>, El Amor brujo - Suite Lorca Canciones españolas antiguas<sup>a</sup>**

**Estrella Morente** sop **Javier Perianes** pf

Harmonia Mundi ① HMC90 2246 (69' • DDD • T/t)



This fascinating disc finds Javier Perianes and flamenco singer Estrella Morente shedding new light on the influence of Spanish folksong on both Falla's music and Lorca's poetry. We're so used to hearing classically trained sopranos or mezzos such as Victoria de los Angeles, Teresa Berganza or Shirley Verrett performing the vocal numbers from *El Amor brujo* that we easily forget that Falla insisted they be performed

by a folk singer. We've similarly lost sight of the fact that Lorca trained as a composer before turning to poetry, collected and arranged folk music for most of his life and in 1931 recorded his own *Canciones españolas antiguas* with the flamenco diva La Argentinita, whom Morente acknowledges as a major influence on her work.

Perianes consequently gives us the *El Amor brujo* piano suite, to which the vocal 'Canción del fuego fatuo' has been added, before accompanying Morente in Lorca's collection, and both performances are utterly mesmerising. Perianes plays *El Amor brujo* with an impeccable combination of sensuality and percussive weight. The Debussian elements, controversial in Falla's lifetime, are very much to the fore, sharpening the contrast between classical refinement and the earthiness of Morente's singing. This is a remarkable voice – raspy, sexy, lived-in, knowing – and it's hard to imagine Lorca's songs bettered, as she takes us into the world of narrative, emotion and archetype that informs his poetry, as desire and ritual collide, toreadors are loved, lost and mourned, and vitality and death jostle for supremacy.

The disc opens less successfully, however, with Falla's *Siete Canciones populares españolas*, which share some of their material with Lorca's collection. The compositional process here effectively reverses that of *El Amor brujo*, turning an operatic diva into a flamenco singer rather than anchoring a folk musician in a classical score: Falla himself recorded them with Maria Barrientos, admired in her day as Zerbinetta and Stravinsky's Nightingale. Morente certainly throws herself into them with formidable commitment. The cries of 'Ay' in the 'Polo' sound wrenching from her and rightly disturbing. But even using a low transposition, the 'Jota' lies fractionally too high, and 'Nana' doesn't float as easily as it should. Even so, it's a remarkable disc, and essential listening if you care for *El Amor brujo* or Lorca's work.

**Tim Ashley**



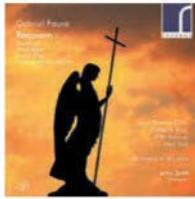
The late John Scott conducting the choir of St Thomas in New York, which offer 'a forthright, devotional interpretation' of Fauré's Requiem

## Fauré

Requiem, Op 48<sup>a</sup>. Cantique de Jean Racine, Op 11. Messe basse. Two Offertories, Op 65

<sup>a</sup>Richard Pittsinger treb <sup>b</sup>David Pittsinger bar  
St Thomas Choir of Men & Boys, Fifth Avenue, New York; Orchestra of St Luke's / John Scott

Resonus  RES10174 (58' • DDD • T/t)



The St Thomas Choir of Men & Boys take John Rutter's edition of

Fauré's 1893 score as the basis for their recording of the Requiem, carefully presenting it in the wider context of the composer's sacred works, well known or otherwise. Conducted by John Scott, it's a forthright, devotional interpretation that avoids heavyweight solemnity without losing sight of the work's ritual elements. Once past the opening chords, the *Introit* has a processional spring in its step. There's a dignified austerity in the playing, with a dark richness in the strings, and the St Luke's brass warm and dignified at the climaxes.

This is a fine choir, the treble tone appealingly bright, altos and tenors unearthly yet beautiful in the *Offertoire*,

and the tenors on their own super-refined at the start of the *Sanctus*. David Pittsinger is the admirably consolatory baritone, and his son Richard the secure treble soloist in the *Pie Jesu*. The reverberant acoustic of St Thomas's Church itself adds immeasurably to the liturgical atmosphere, though we lose some orchestral detail and the balance is top-heavy, the lower voices sometimes obscured. As one might expect with such a frequently recorded, editorially complex work, the competition is stiff, not least from Stephen Cleobury's scholarly account (King's College, 10/14) and Paavo Järvi and the Chœur de l'Orchestre de Paris (Virgin, 5/12), altogether grander in approach, using the 1900 score.

Cool, unsentimental performances of the *Cantique de Jean Racine* and the *Messe basse* are among its companion pieces. Less familiar is the Op 65 pairing of the *Ave verum* and *Tantum ergo* from 1911, possibly written for the Madeleine trebles, though the published score stipulates female voices. Plainchant morphs into something curiously like Gounod in the *Ave verum*; *Tantum ergo*, with its closely woven solo writing, is perhaps more immediately attractive. Both, however, are most persuasively done. **Tim Ashley**

## Furrer

Enigma I-VI<sup>a</sup>. voices – still<sup>b</sup>.

...cold and calm and moving<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Helsinki Chamber Choir; <sup>b</sup>Uusinta Ensemble / Nils Schweckendiek

Toccata Classics  TOCC0360 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Ambitious ensemble works such as *Nuun* and operas including *Fama*, *Begebren* and *Westenbuch* (recorded on Kairos, along with as much else in a prolific output) have won the Swiss composer Beat Furrer (b1954) a high status in closeted avant-garde circles. This beautifully produced disc of choral music could usefully challenge that reputation and introduce him to a broader audience.

The first four of six *a cappella* *Enigmas* (2006-13) swell and throb around darkly mystical prophecies of Leonardo da Vinci while preserving line and sense. Such textual fidelity is dramatically splintered by the fifth in the series. Rough breathing and extended vocal techniques crumple and then shred Leonardo's words into the ghosts and shadows that are the object of his disturbed contemplation. Where the

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dominant pitch direction was previously in descent to a piteously imagined abyss, the final *Enigma*, 'On Metals', inexorably rises through a thermal and abruptly vanishes.

The tests on performers are even stronger, the expression weaker and more diffuse, in *voices – still* (2001), which layers a lovely fragment of Virgilian pastoral over a previously composed ensemble piece. Restless, glittering textures offer much passing diversion on their way to another abrupt but satisfying conclusion.

Even so, Furrer's mastery of timing emerges with a more instinctively felt sense of rightness from the initially loose-leaved pages of ...*cold and calm and moving* (1992). Scored for a Feldmanesque ensemble of flute, harp and string trio, the notes hang in suspended animation with no special place to go, and no pressing need to go there. Quiet poise and patience are required both by listeners and by performers, and supplied by the Uusinta Ensemble. As well as conducting with a sure hand, Nils Schreckendiek has written useful booklet-notes. **Peter Quantrill**

## Fux · Kerll



Fux *Kaiserrequiem*<sup>a</sup> Kerll *Missa pro defunctis*<sup>b</sup>

Vox Luminis; <sup>a</sup>Scorpio Collectief;

<sup>b</sup>L'Achéron / Lionel Meunier

Ricercar (R) RIC368 (75' · DDD · T)



Kerll's *Missa pro defunctis* (published 1689) was dedicated to Emperor Leopold I,

and its preface reveals that the composer wanted it performed at his own funeral. Vox Luminis's consummate mastery of polyphonic textures, plangent sonorities and contoured phrasing is profoundly beautiful; the five soloists and five additional 'ripieno' singers declaim text with clarity and decorum. An organist and the four-part viol consort L'Achéron often double the voices but sometimes play independent *concertante* parts, such as the quivering accompaniment to 'Quantus tremor' (a tremulous bass solo), a fanfare-like attack to dotted rhythms during 'Tuba mirum' (a tenor solo), and mellifluous sustained lines and discreetly shaped suspensions in support of 'Mors stupebit' (an alto solo) and 'Lacrimosa' (a brief soprano solo). In contrapuntal choruses – whether the quick-moving detail of 'Quam olim Abrahe' or the unfurling serenity of 'Lux aeterna' – the combination of all 15 musicians is solemnly compassionate.

Fux's Requiem was performed at the funeral of the Dowager Empress Eleonore

Magdalene of Neuburg (widow of Leopold I) in 1720, and thereafter acquired the nickname *Kaiserrequiem* because it was revived for the obsequies of Charles VI in 1740. Fux's famed skill at counterpoint is also explicit in ritornellos that occur occasionally – usually for two violins, viola and basso continuo, but Mozartians will notice the use of solo trombone in 'Tuba mirum' (an alto solo); in larger-scale passages the instrumentalists of Scorpio Collectief double the choir with two muted cornets, two trombones and bassoon. The connected short movements in the Sequence present a lovely fluidity between the 'Recordare' (a solo quartet) and the ensuing 'Quaerens me' (full ensemble weaving gently); an elegant little trio for two sopranos and alto ('Inter oves') proceeds into a darker-hued choral 'Confutatis'. Polyphonic strands rise in arching phrases in the nuanced 'Sanctus', and a seamless progression of suspensions and resolutions from top to bottom of the musical texture caps off a consoling 'Communio'. An alternative recording of the *Kaiserrequiem* by Roland Wilson's Musica Fiata and La Capella Ducale has more pronounced rhythmical chiaroscuro but is vocally uneven, whereas the refinement of Vox Luminis is never anything less than sublime. **David Vickers**

Fux – selected comparison:

*Musica Fiata, Capella Ducale, Wilson*  
(DHM) 88697 95997-2

## Jackson



'Vox clara'

Aria for Joel and Vicki<sup>a</sup>. *Cantate Domino*. *Confirma hoc Deus*. *Factus est repente*. *Herzliebster Jesu*, was hast du verbrochen?. *Holy* is the true light. *Missa Triuierensis*. Seven Advent Antiphons. *That wind blowing and that tide*. *Vox clara ecce intonat*

*Truro Cathedral Choir / Christopher Gray* with

<sup>a</sup>*Joel Garthwaite sax Luke Bond org*  
Regent (R) REGCD479 (75' · DDD · T/t)



This generously filled disc contains no fewer than eight premiere recordings among its 22 tracks. They reveal that Gabriel Jackson (b1962) continues to produce sacred choral music of the highest invention, responding to commissions with vivid panache. His music can – in an instant – switch from richly layered ecstasy to direct, hushed intimacy, for example in the anthem *Cantate Domino*.

It helps, of course, that as a former cathedral chorister he knows what makes

singers tick. The most recent fruit of his long association with Truro Cathedral Choir is the stunning Kipling setting *That wind blowing and that tide* (2015), a First World War commemoration composed in collaboration with the boy choristers. Here, Jackson's trademark 'organic succession' of ideas guides the listener with such a poignant ebb and flow that one can palpably sense the gently drifting fog of the Western Front. The boys also make the most of what Jackson terms their 'aleatoric rushing wind' in the Pentecostal motet *Factus est repente*, as well as the highly effective whispered mutterings of 'those who dwell in darkness' in the fourth *Advent Antiphon* ('O clavis David'). With its compact dimensions, the *Truro Mass* is clearly redolent of the Tudor masters Byrd and Tye, now passed through the austere filter of Stravinsky.

High praise, too, for organist Luke Bond, who soothes with the heart-stoppingly gorgeous chorale prelude on *Herzliebster Jesu* and accompanies saxophonist Joel Garthwaite with acute sensitivity in the *Aria for Joel and Vicki*. Garthwaite features variously on soprano, alto and tenor saxes, enhancing the Kipling piece and the disc's title-track.

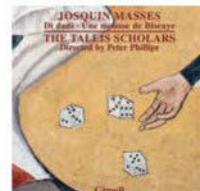
With engaging and enlightening notes by the composer and superb engineering and production by Gary Cole, this glorious release is unbeatable. **Malcolm Riley**

## Josquin

Masses – *Di dadi*; *Une mousse de Biscaye*

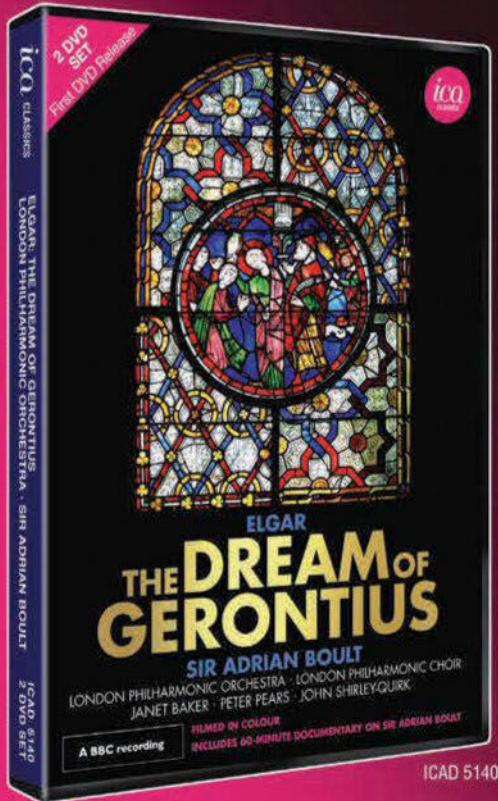
*The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips*

Gimell (R) CDGIMO48 (71' · DDD · T/t)



One of the sad things about Josquin research is that works are judged spurious – or even just possibly spurious – and then get forgotten entirely. That is partly because there are so many superb Josquin works that are beyond doubt; but all the same it is a pity. Besides, the case of the *Missa Une mousse de Biscaye* has been one of the most energetically argued over the years, both for and against. The main issues here are that there are a lot of dissonances that are uncharacteristic of his mature style; and the main counter-argument is that in his early years he was experimenting with many different styles. Either way, there seems not to have been a recording of it since 1959, which is a great pity, because it is a marvellous piece, whoever composed it. Some years ago I went on record as thinking that, on balance, it was probably

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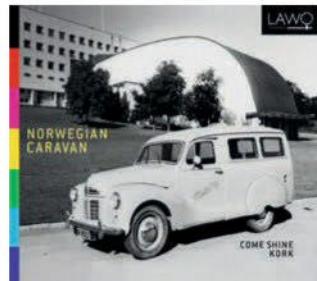
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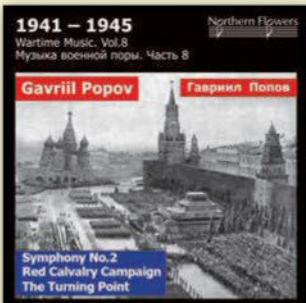
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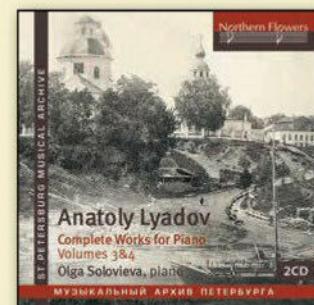
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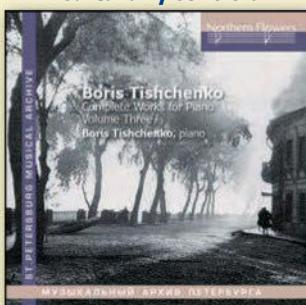
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not by Josquin. Now that I have heard this wonderful recording I am almost ready to rethink the whole thing.

In his booklet-note, Peter Phillips makes no secret of the disputed nature of both Masses on this record; that the cover simply describes both as 'Josquin Masses' seems to me no problem, though obviously some purchasers could feel duped. But what is clear is that both works are magnificent achievements, beautifully sung. As concerns the *Missa Di dadi*, I am still inclined to stay with my earlier view that it is by a younger composer who had absorbed Josquin's style; but the important matter here is that Peter Phillips and The Tallis Scholars approach the two works in entirely different ways, treating the *Missa Di dadi* in a much gentler manner, with extended passages allotted to solo voices, whereas the *Missa Une mousse de Biscaye* gets a much more robust performance. In both Masses they have only eight voices, with women on only the top line. **David Fallows**

## Leo · Durante

'Sacred Works'

**Durante** Organ Concerto No 4 **Leo** Salve regina - in C minor; in F. II figliuol prodigo. Lezione del Giovedi Santo. Toccatas - No 2; No 14

**Ensemble &cetera / Ulrike Hofbauer**

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi  88875 05744-2 (69' • DDD • T/t)



If &cetera is not a name that rings a bell, it's because this is a relatively new period ensemble, founded and directed by the soprano Ulrike Hofbauer and consisting of violinists Peter Barczi and Eva Borhi, violist Matthieu Camillieri, cellist Bernadette Köbele and Markus Hünninger on harpsichord and organ. As a result, this disc is an interesting beast right from the beginning, because aside from its containing two premiere recordings – Leonardo Leo's cantata *The Prodigal Son* and his *Good Friday Lamentations* – Hofbauer is both director and soprano soloist.

To start with the praise, the repertoire itself is interesting for its variety, Leo's sacred vocal music being joined by two of his harpsichord toccatas and also a concerto from his chief rival in 1720s Naples, Francesco Durante. &cetera themselves are a highly enjoyable discovery, too. There's a very attractive gentleness and elegance to their sound, along with some superb blending. The Durante concerto is a high point, and I could also happily sit through

Hünninger performing a whole disc of Leo's toccatas, subtly emotive and graceful as his playing is.

However, the disc's headline repertoire is of course Leo's sacred vocal works, and with these I struggled slightly more to enjoy myself. Hofbauer's own sound matches the gentleness she's drawn from her colleagues. This ultimately, though, makes for a slight one-flavour quality. Still, I suspect the real root of my problem with the disc's vocal element is actually the recording acoustic itself, because whilst Drebber's Marienkirche makes for a very sympathetic background for the instruments, Hofbauer herself sounds curiously removed and lost in the space. As a result, there's every possibility that with different engineering I could have wallowed in her loveliness quite happily. **Charlotte Gardner**

## Pärt

**Da pacem Domine. Dopo la vittoria. Seven Magnificat Antiphons. Nunc dimittis. The Woman with the Alabaster Box. Tribute to Caesar. Triodion. Virgencita**

**Latvian Radio Choir / Sigvards Kjava**

Ondine  ODE1286-2 (73' • DDD • T/t)

## Pärt

'The Deer's Cry'  
Alleluja Tropus. And one of the Pharisees.  
Da pacem Domine. The Deer's Cry. Gebet nach dem Kanon. Habitare fratres in unum.  
Drei Hirtenkinder aus Fátima. Most holy Mother of God. Sei gelobt, du Baum. Summa. Veni Creator. Virgencita. Von Angesicht zu Angesicht

**Vox Clamantis / Jaan-Eik Tulve**

ECM New Series  481 2449 (62' • DDD • T/t)



The arrival of a new disc by the Latvian Radio Choir is always guaranteed to quicken the reviewer's pulse. They have rightly bolstered their high reputation for 20th-century and contemporary repertoire with acclaimed recent recordings on the Ondine label of important works by Ešenvalds, Silvestrov and Rachmaninov. Now comes this handsomely produced anthology of 70 minutes of sacred *a cappella* music by Arvo Pärt, much of it rarely heard, but presented here with an assured and winning finesse.

From the outset, Sigvards Kjava draws a robust, blended sound from his 24 singers, opening with *Triodion*, a Lancing College 150th anniversary commission dating from 1998. It is followed by the *Seven Magnificat*

*Antiphons*, the earliest work here, which shimmers evocatively. After such prolonged slow-moving music it comes as some relief to turn to the animated 'piccolo cantata' *Dopo la vittoria*, one of the few pieces written in a major key.

The two narrative motets on texts from the Gospel of St Matthew, *The Woman with the Alabaster Box* and *Tribute to Caesar*, also stand out for their integrity and beauty. Further variety is offered by the most recent work on the disc, *Virgencita* (2012), sung in Spanish and inspired by the legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The concluding (and highly popular) *Da pacem Domine* also appears on a new all-Pärt release from the Estonian choral/instrumental ensemble Vox Clamantis on ECM. With a smaller number of singers and closer microphone placement, their tone comes across as more immediate and reedier, especially in the bass section. In many ways their programme is more satisfying, including as it does some short choral works with clarinet, violin, viola, double bass, lute and organ obbligato. Jaan-Eik Tulve directs a programme, recorded in 2007 and 2013-14, which spans almost 40 years of Pärt's choral output, starting with *Summa* (1977), sung here by a vocal quartet.

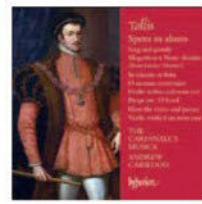
Despite a frustratingly hopeless booklet (padded out with seven colour photos, though devoid of any explanatory notes), this is an important and highly rewarding release. It clearly has the approval of the composer, who is pictured at the recording sessions. **Malcolm Riley**

## Tallis

Blessed are those that be undefiled. God grant with grace. Hear the voice and prayer. Hodie nobis caelorum rex. In ieunio et fletu. My soul cleaveth to the dust. O do well unto thy servant. O Lord, in thee is all my trust. O sacram convivium. Preces & Responses II. Purge me, O Lord. Remember not, O Lord God. Short Service, 'Dorian'. Sing and glorify. Spem in alium. Verily, verily I say unto you. Wherewithal shall a young man

**The Cardinall's Musick / Andrew Carwood**

Hyperion  CDA68156 (77' • DDD • T/t)



With *Spem in alium* (or, in its English guise, *Sing and glorify*), The Cardinall's Musick conclude their Tallis explorations in style. The programming is on a par with the best instalments of the series: the placing of the lovely miniature *God grant with grace* just after the monumental *Spem*

# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## ANCIENT AND MODERN

Andrew Mellor on a batch of recordings of unaccompanied choral music



London-based choir Siglo de Oro 'hits you with its character and depth' on a new disc for Delphian

Even within the realms of largely unaccompanied vocal music sung by relatively small groups, there's an awful lot of variance in these five recordings. Perhaps the best way to deal with the singing is to slice each ensemble through the torso and examine the perennially revealing issue of blend, which these days appears to be as laden with potential approaches and techniques as the art of composition itself.

Take, for example, Byrd's monolithic motet *Infelix ego* from Suzy Digby's ensemble **Ora**. Do you hear the grain of the polyphony and its twisting strands in this performance? Yes, rather more than from the ultra-smooth Collegium Vocale Gent but nowhere near as much as from the single voices of The Cardinall's Musick. No surprises there. But Digby does seem more interested in the music's vertical resonance than its horizontal weave, and the piece can sound oddly homophonic as a result, diminishing those moments when it plunges from polyphony into actual homophony.

Straight after Byrd's setting comes that by Ēriks Ešenvalds. But the Latvian's piece isn't so much a 'setting' as a mash-up of Byrd's original. I can't get a handle on it as anything other than an echoing post-script, and that constitutes another way in which this whole disc is a little slippery. The unifying theme is Girolamo Savonarola (he who wrote the text to *Infelix*) but you

have to dig deep into the booklet to get chapter and verse on why that is; he's not mentioned on the elusive cover and is only vaguely implicit in the poetic title.

Digby opens with Ben Byram Wigfield's new edition of Allegri's *Miserere*, not quite as radically different from the known version as Graham O'Reilly's but sharing some of the Australian's distilling features and one alluring chromatic restoration. There's nothing wrong with the singing but the group can sound light and breathy; Digby is surely the most important performing musician represented on any of these recordings, given the reach and energy of her work, but her ensemble has yet to find its feet.

That's the very reason I find **Siglo de Oro** so invigorating. Professional London start-ups can sound frustratingly generic but this one hits you with its character and depth, and with an approach to blend that doesn't want to paper over the music's joins but instead uses voices of similar weight and vibrato to ensure we hear the grind of the parts while never being in any doubt that the ensemble is a single unit.

The concept behind 'Drop down, ye heavens' is neat: specially commissioned settings of the Advent Antiphons for choir and saxophones. The spectrum of featured composers isn't as wide as it could be, and some pieces wander into a stylistic cul-de-sac of church music clichés (the added sevenths and ninths and gauche

triplets that were passé in the choir stalls 40 years ago). But there are some relevant pieces too: the harmonic frisson of Will Todd's *O Wisdom* and Francis Pott's *O Key of David* suit the group's qualities, and there's ear-catching craft in Judith Weir's well-known title-track. A modest sprinkling of Renaissance rarities provides oases of context but can underline the lack of distinction in some of the living composers too.

Chronologically preceding Siglo di Oro's Advent journey is the **Reykjavík Schola Cantorum**'s snapshot of music for the commemorative month of November. The ensemble is associated with the Icelandic capital's neo-Gothic Hallgrímskirkja and it has that characteristically Nordic approach to blend: smooth, light and perhaps just that bit too cool for the Tavener and MacMillan works included. But director Hörður Áskelsson knows that choral blend comes as much from vowel harmony as from vocal tone, and that's best demonstrated in radiant performances of simply built works by Icelanders Thorkell Sigurbjörnsson and Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, and in Jón Leifs's brief Requiem.

Priorities in terms of blend are wholly different for the four instruments of **Gothic Voices**, who present a programme of Marian solo and ensemble pieces from the medieval period spliced with works by Joanne Metcalfe and Andrew

Smith. It's fascinating how Smith picks up on the harmonic DNA of those ancient pieces while tapping a different harmonic language; the disc's highlight comes when his setting of *Stond wel, Moder under rode* follows the anonymous 13th-century setting of the same text, each piece supercharged with the ensemble's raw, intense but poetic style founded on the very basics of vocal communication. This was a time before blend and vowel-harmony as we know them, and Gothic Voices tell us how and why.

Their pioneering and *Gramophone* Award-winning work, in fact, is cited in the booklet for **Mediva**'s disc of sequences by Hildegard von Bingen combined with new works for voices and medieval instruments by Hugh Collins Rice. Confession time: despite her extraordinary vision and relevance, I've often found it hard to get a handle on Hildegard's world, but feel this disc has opened countless doors in a process of what might be called accessibility through rigour.

First of all, **Mediva**'s performances of Hildegard's works come with no kitsch medieval baggage and no vaseline on the lens; there is an earthy directness here. But it's Collins Rice who really underlines his predecessor's uncompromising reach by bravely and successfully picking up on her aesthetic at full-throttle. His vocal music is deeply expressive, while his idea of pre-counterpoint counterpoint taps something deeply, naturally human. And while we're talking of blend, the interactive possibilities of medieval instruments seem to propel him to something evocative but trendless. It's a mark of the disc's success that you don't always know whether it's Collins Rice you're listening to or Hildegard; each sounds as contemporary as the other. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



### 'Refuge from the Flames'

Ora / Suzy Digby

Harmonia Mundi  HMW90 6103



### 'Drop down, ye heavens'

Siglo de Oro / Patrick Allies

Delphian  DCD34184



### 'Meditatio' Schola Cantorum

Reykjavík / Hörður Áskelsson

BIS  BIS2200



### 'Mary Star of the Sea'

Gothic Voices

Linn  CKD514



### Hildegard. Collins Rice Sequences

Mediva

Odradek  ODRCD322

is very moving, and this *In ieiunio* is as fine an account of it as I can recall.

The rest of the recital alternates rarely heard selections (though I can do without the sets of Preces and Responses) and more familiar selections (*O sacrum convivum*, for instance), but naturally one's interest gravitates toward *Spem*. As far as I'm aware, only one other recording (by I Fagiolini) has appeared since I surveyed its discography in the round in 2010, and this one also adds a new twist: the well-known contemporary report of its first performance, which suggests that it took place in a large hall rather than a church, sanctions the comparatively dry acoustic heard here. (If memory serves, the only other acoustic as dry as this is Michael Tippett's with the Morley College Choir from 1948). Without the sonic 'glue' afforded them by lengthy reverberation, Carwood's ensemble give the sense of an unfolding tapestry, and the sound recording holds detail and monumentality in fine balance (barring some strange ringing overtones at 2'32"). Some impetus is lost in the opening 'Mexican wave', but the first *tutti* grows organically out of what preceded, and the build-up preceding the pause at 'in tribulatione' is very nicely managed. But, apart from the awesome initial arrival on 'Respice', it's a seamless rather than a dramatic view of *Spem*.

The only disappointment is that the English version, which concludes the disc, is not more contrasted in approach. *Spem* was revived for the inaugurations as Princes of Wales of both of James I's sons early in the following century, but despite a slightly faster tempo, the celebratory overtones are not captured as thrillingly as on The Sixteen's most recent account for Coro, which also gives both versions alongside each other. **Fabrice Fitch**

*Spem in alium, Sing and glorify – selected comparison: Sixteen, Christophers (2/10) (CORO) CORSACD16016*

## Vaughan Williams

### 'Discoveries'

*Three Nocturnes*<sup>a</sup>. *A Road All Paved With Stars*.

*Stricken Peninsula*. *Four Last Songs*<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Jennifer Johnston *mez* <sup>b</sup>Roderick Williams *bar*

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

Albion  ALBCD028 (64' • DDD • T)

## Vaughan Williams

### 'Purer than Pearl'

Eight Songs from *The Poisoned Kiss*

(arr Adrian Williams). *Crossing the bar*.

*Dirge for Fidele*. *How the cold wind doth blow*.

*It was a lover and his lass*. *The Last Invocation*.

*The Lawyer*. *Linden Lea*.

*Lollipop's Song*. *The Love-Song of the Birds*.

*Rumpelstiltskin's Song*. *Searching for Lambs*.

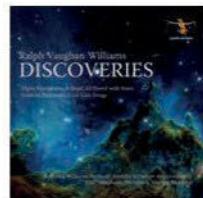
*Spinning Song*. *Summum bonum*. *Wishes*

**Mary Bevan** *sop* **Jennifer Johnston** *mez*

**Nicky Spence** *ten* **Johnny Herford** *bar*

**Thomas Gould** *vn* **William Vann** *pf*

Albion  ALBCD029 (67' • DDD • T)



Discoveries don't come much more rewarding than Vaughan Williams's *Three Nocturnes*. Dating from 1908 (the year of his tutelage with Ravel in Paris), they are settings of his favourite poet Walt Whitman, the second of which, 'Whispers of heavenly death', only came to light in 2000 (and was recorded three years later by Roderick Williams and the LSO under Richard Hickox – Chandos, 11/03). Now Anthony Payne has orchestrated the remaining two – and a marvellous job he has done, too, bringing out every adventurous facet of this often astonishingly forward-looking music with its pre-echoes of *A London Symphony*, *Sancta civitas* and (especially) *A Pastoral Symphony*. Payne's consummate understanding of the idiom is also evident in the deeply touching *Four Last Songs* (to words by RVW's wife, Ursula), where he skilfully incorporates orchestral techniques employed in the *Sinfonia antartica* and questing Ninth Symphony. Roderick Williams and Jennifer Johnston are on stellar form, while Martyn Brabbins and the BBC SO give of their very best both here and in two purely orchestral offerings. Of the 11 film scores that Vaughan Williams penned between 1940 and 1956, only one was lost: *Stricken Peninsula* is a short propaganda film from 1945 about the Allied Armies' aid efforts in southern Italy, and Philip Lane has fashioned some of the best ideas he was able to hear behind the narration on the original soundtrack into an eight-minute 'Italian Rhapsody'. Last, but definitely not least, comes *A Road All Paved With Stars*: based on tunes from the 1936 comic opera *The Poisoned Kiss*, this sumptuous 27-minute symphonic essay by Adrian Williams does ample justice to its source material's soaring lyricism and tender warmth.

On a companion disc Williams has also arranged eight of the most memorable songs and duets from the same opera with piano accompaniment. It is indeed a most gratifying sequence, including such gems as 'Blue larkspur in a garden', 'Dear love' and 'The enchanted air', and preceded here by 14 further examples of RVW's song-writing gifts. Presented in chronological order, they range from 1891's 'Summum



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bonum' (a passionate setting of Robert Browning by the 19-year-old RCM student – with a quotation from *Tristan und Isolde* in the piano part) to the *Two English Folksongs* for tenor and violin first published in 1935. 'Linden Lea' is heard in a mellifluous version for SATB and piano from 1929 by Sumner Salter (1856–1944), and I'm very much taken with the piercingly poignant 1912 setting of the folksong 'How cold the wind doth blow' (alternatively known as 'The Unquiet Grave'). Listen out, too, for those especially imaginative duet treatments of Whitman's 'The Last Invocation' and 'The Love-Song of the Birds', as well as 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun' from *Cymbeline* and 'It was a lover and his lass' from *As You Like It*. Vocal and instrumental contributions alike leave nothing to be desired – and a special word of praise for William Vann's deft pianism.

Exemplary production values bolster the appeal of these two Albion releases, both of which can be cordially recommended to all RVW acolytes. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Aksel!

**JS Bach** *Bist du bei mir*, BWV508. Cantata No 51  
- *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*. Cantata No 68 -  
Mein gläubiges Herze. Cantata No 205 -  
Angenehmer Zephyrus. Magnificat, BWV243  
- *Quia respexit*. St John Passion, BWV245 - Ich  
folge dir gleichfalls **Handel** *Alcina* - *Barbara!* Io  
ben lo so; Chi m'insegna il caro padre. *Eternal*  
*Source of Light Divine*, HWV74. *Joshua*, HWV64  
- Happy, oh thrice happy we; Oh! had I Jubal's  
lyre. *Messiah*, HWV56 - How beautiful are the  
feet; Thou art gone up on high. *Rinaldo* - *Lascia*  
ch'io pianga. *Samson*, HWV57 - Let the bright  
*Seraphim* **Mozart** *Exsultate, jubilate*, K165 -  
Alleluia. *Le nozze di Figaro* - Non so più; Voi,  
che sapete

**Aksel Rykkvin** *treb* **Orchestra of the**  
**Age of Enlightenment** / **Nigel Short**  
Signum  SIGCD435 (58' • DDD • T/t)



A successful boy treble is every record label's nightmare. No sooner does your artist reach his peak than he is forced to retire for at least a decade. Which is no reason not to celebrate and preserve this fleeting musical moment. Thirteen-year-old Norwegian chorister Aksel Rykkvin is certainly a treble worth preserving – a mature, musical performer whose unbroken voice offers a fascinating alternative take on much of the familiar repertoire recorded here.

Ignore the exclamation mark of the title. It does Rykkvin an enormous disservice, reducing what is an

accomplished and adult disc to a novelty nightmare. The music here is carefully chosen – not just textually but musically appropriate for so young a performer. There are no Queen of the Night arias nor twee arrangements of Puccini, just a solid mixture of Bach, Handel and Mozart. Some will balk at a treble singing Cherubino's arias, but if the result isn't exactly authentic it's a fascinating and legitimate experiment, especially when performed as well as here, with Rykkvin living the breathless, desperate emotional confusion of 'Non so più'.

Recordings of 'Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen' and 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' make the most of this agile, accurate voice, while *Eternal Source* celebrates the easy grace of his upper register. But most interesting, perhaps, are Oberto's two arias from Handel's *Alcina*. Composed for the treble William Savage, these are nevertheless uncompromisingly virtuoso pieces, especially the dramatic 'Barbara! Io ben lo so' – a rare example of serious operatic repertoire for this voice. Rykkvin's passagework is nimble, his phrasing instinctive, and if he doesn't have quite the emotional maturity 12-year-old Tolzer Knabenchor treble Elias Madler recently displayed in Katie Mitchell's staged production for the Aix festival, this might be explained by the lack of dramatic context.

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and conductor Nigel Short are Rykkvin's very classy colleagues, supporting the young soloist with some exquisite obbligato solos and consistently lively, generous tempi. All add up to a recording that's much more than just the cute curiosity its cover suggests.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Chanson perpétuelle'

**Berlioz** *La captive*<sup>b</sup> **Caplet** *Viens – une flûte*  
invisible soupir<sup>a</sup> **Chausson** *Chanson*  
*perpétuelle*<sup>c</sup> **Debussy** *Proses lyriques* **Gaubert**  
*Soir païen*<sup>a</sup> **Ravel** *Chansons madécasses*<sup>ab</sup>.  
*Histoires naturelles* **Saint-Saëns** *Une flûte*  
invisible<sup>a</sup>. *Violons dans le soir*<sup>c</sup>  
**Katherine Broderick** *sop* **James Baillieu** *pf* with  
<sup>a</sup>**Adam Walker** *fl* <sup>b</sup>**Tim Lowe** *vc* **'Heath Quartet**  
Champs Hill  CHRCD095 (81' • DDD • T/t)



There's been a surge of interest in French chamber songs of late, and Katherine Broderick's new Champs Hill recital shares some of its material, inevitably perhaps, with both Marie-Nicole Lemieux's

'Chansons perpétuelles' (Naïve, 6/15) and Karine Deshayes's 'Après un rêve' (Aparté, 9/15). By not limiting herself to the *fin de siècle* repertoire, however, Broderick is able to include Ravel's *Chansons madécasses*, along with rarities by Caplet and Gaubert that her predecessors omit.

Broderick is well known on the operatic stage as Donna Anna and Brünnhilde, and her steely soprano and declamatory way with words serve her wonderfully well when it comes to Debussy and Ravel. She delivers 'Aoua' from the *Chansons madécasses* with blistering heft, and her no-frills way with the rest of the cycle makes it sexier and subtler than the suggestive approach favoured by some interpreters. The voice's size really tells in Debussy's *Proses lyriques*, meanwhile, which, as the booklet-notes point out, needs a bigger sound than usual in French song, though there are also some rapturous high *pianissimos*, beautifully taken. Elsewhere we could do with a bit more lyricism: Deshayes's sense of line gives her the edge over Broderick in Berlioz; Chausson's 'Chanson perpétuelle' is grandly tragic, though Lemieux's mix of sensuality and introversion is preferable here.

James Baillieu is Broderick's outstanding pianist, nowhere more so than in *Chansons madécasses*, where Ravel's insidious ostinatos really creep under your skin. Adam Walker, the LSO's principal flautist, is breathtaking in Saint-Saëns's 'Une flûte invisible', while cellist Tim Lowe sounds poised and elegant throughout. The Heath Quartet don't have as much to do as one would like, though leader Oliver Heath comes into his own in the big violin obbligato for Saint-Saëns's 'Violons du soir'. The recording itself makes Walker over-prominent but is otherwise as clear and spacious as one could wish. **Tim Ashley**

## 'The Old Colony Collection'

**Avison** Sound the loud timbrel **Chapple** It is a  
good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.  
I waited patiently for the Lord. O come, let us  
sing unto the Lord **Handel** Israel in Egypt – And  
Miriam the prophetess; For the host of Pharaoh;  
The Lord shall reign; Moses and the Children of  
Israel; Sing ye to the Lord. *Messiah* – But thou  
didst not leave; He was cut off; Lift up your  
heads **Kent** Hear my prayer. Who is this that  
cometh from Edom? **Linley** I Bow down thine  
ear, O Lord **Mendelssohn** Peace I leave with you  
**Mozart** Almighty God when round thy shrine  
**Traditional** Hark! the vesper hymn is stealing  
(Russian air) **Webbe** When winds breathe soft  
**Handel and Haydn Society Chorus /**  
**Harry Christophers**  
Coro  CORO16145 (70' • DDD • T/t)



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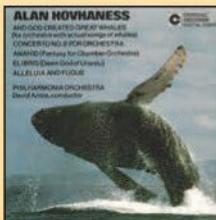
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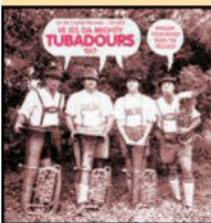
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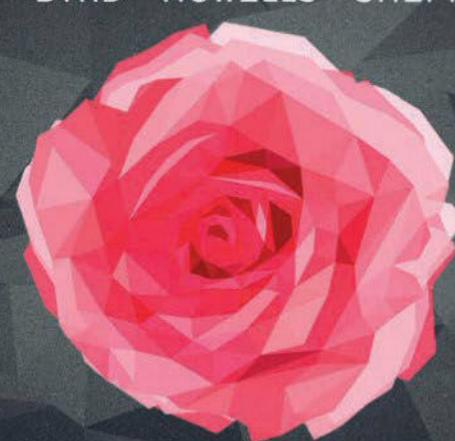
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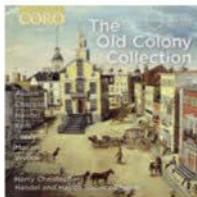
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Founded in 1815, Boston's Handel and Haydn Society Chorus is the oldest still-extant performing arts organisation in America. For their latest recording with Harry Christophers, the choir delve into their own musical history, revealing not only a fascinating and relatively unknown body of English choral music but also exposing some of the traditions and practices of the American glee clubs.

In its earliest days the Handel and Haydn Society not only performed concerts but also published volumes of anthems and glees. It's one of these – *The Old Colony Collection* – that forms the basis of this album. The 18th-century names here – James Kent, Thomas Linley, Charles Avison, Samuel Chapple – may be unfamiliar but their style is a recognisable fusion of the elegant verse anthems of Purcell and Handel's oratorio choruses.

Kent's *Hear my prayer* is an exquisite opener. Two solo sopranos duet with Purcellian poise over a colourful continuo from cello (Guy Fishman) and chamber organ (deftly and occasionally just a little outrageously played by Ian Watson), supported with occasional choral interjections from Christophers's small chamber ensemble of singers. If not all the works can match Kent's taste and invention, there are plenty of gems here, including Samuel Webbe's *When winds breathe soft*, the lulling melody of the outer sections framing a stormy, contrapuntal central episode, and the anonymous folk-hymn *Hark! the vesper hymn is stealing*, an exercise in textural restraint and endless legato.

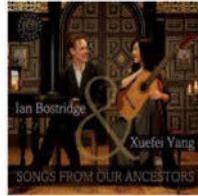
Music by Handel, Mendelssohn and Mozart was also popular fodder for the society, and *The Old Colony Collection* featured choruses from *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*, Mendelssohn's perfect miniature *Peace I leave with you* and an arrangement of 'O Isis und Osiris' for chorus, reworked as 'Almighty God when round thy shrine'. All are stylishly sung here – possibly inauthentically so, given the original society's well-documented breaks for 'tuning' of the alcoholic variety.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Songs From Our Ancestors'

**Anonymous** *Flowing Water* **Argento** *Letters from Composers* – Chopin; Schubert **Britten** *Gloriana* – The Second Lute Song of the Earl of Essex (arr Bream) **Chen Yi** *Shuo Chang Dowland* Come again, sweet love doth now invite. Flow

my tears. In darkness let me dwell. My thoughts are winged with hopes. White as lilies was her face **Goss** *The Book of Songs* **Ruan Ji** *Drunken Ecstasy* **Schubert** *An die Musik*, D547. Der König in Thule, D367. Die Mainacht, D194. Ständchen, D957 No 4 **Xu Changjun** *Sword Dance* **Ian Bostridge** ten **Xuefei Yang** gtr **Globe Music** (GMO01 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Since it opened in January 2014, the Globe's Sam Wanamaker Playhouse has hosted almost as much music as theatre, establishing itself as the concert space London never knew it was missing – intimate, atmospheric and acoustically both clear and warm. Now this unique venue has turned recording studio, establishing its own label, Globe Music, to celebrate the unusual musical encounters, collisions and collaborations the space promotes.

This debut release, 'Songs From Our Ancestors', sets the tone for the future. The album pairs tenor Ian Bostridge with guitarist Xuefei Yang, and while both emerge from the mainstream classical tradition, the emphasis here is very much on East meets West, rubbing the music of Yang's own Chinese culture up against Western art music and seeing the sparks it generates.

The programming is thoughtful – a chronological trip through musical history that pairs Dowland with his Chinese contemporaries before wandering through time to arrive at a cycle of newly commissioned songs by Welsh composer Stephen Goss, a conscious fusion of ancient Chinese texts and contemporary Western textures.

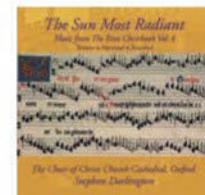
There's a lot going on here, a lot for the ear to assimilate, but it's a disc that really comes into focus with repeated listens. Goss's *The Book of Songs* is a striking series of miniatures, written with clear understanding of Bostridge's distinctive instrument. The voice croons in musical androgyny in 'Oh, you with the blue collar' and barks in broken speech-song fragments in 'In the tavern'. The Schubert songs also work beautifully, the guitar accompaniments taking them from salon to somewhere altogether folkier, and only the Dowland sequence feels a little distended – a live performance that feels a bit over-worked for the intimacy of a recording.

Yang reinvents herself convincingly throughout the disc – now a troubadour, now a folk musician, now a concert-hall soloist. Her selections from Chinese repertoire are tantalising – hints of an alien

musical world that, here, feels far closer than you'd imagine. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'The Sun Most Radiant'

**G**  
'Music from The Eton Choirbook, Vol 4'  
**Browne** *Salve regina* I; II **Horwood** *Gaude flore virginali* **William, Monk of Stratford** *Magnificat* **The Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford** / **Stephen Darlington** **Avie** (AV2359 (69' • DDD • T/t)



With this instalment of music from the Eton Choirbook, the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral sets out to rival The Sixteen's five-volume anthology from the 1990s. Already it seems to me that they surpass it technically – which is remarkable considering the inevitable changes of personnel that time imposes on a choir with boy trebles – and interpretatively. As I noted of Vol 3 (11/14), they have also worked their way through those Eton pieces that had not been recorded before, and the quality of their performances has changed my appreciation of several 'minor' composers for the better.

Volume 4 is the most satisfying of the set since the first. Even by the standards of previous instalments, Stephen Darlington's tempi are surprisingly relaxed, especially in duple-time sections. Judged by the clock one might even call them slow, but the textural detail is so clear that the abiding impression is of deliberation rather than ponderousness. The trebles have stamina and poise, and they understand how to shape their lines, as may be heard in John Browne's *Salve regina* I and William Horwood's *Gaude flore virginali* (the latter being new to the catalogue).

The adult cast is perhaps the strongest of the set so far: their reading of the *Magnificat* by one 'William, Monk of Stratford' is more nuanced than The Sixteen's, so that a work that had seemed to me relatively undistinguished comes across far more favourably. Browne's *Salve regina* I (with trebles) has had several fine recordings but his *Salve regina* II for adult singers is the only one of his completely transmitted pieces that had never been committed to disc. Less immediately striking than its counterpart, the subtle interplay of its lines is increasingly absorbing the more one listens to it. Had more of Browne's music survived, I have little doubt that he would be considered the equal of Dunstable and Taverner, and possibly even Tallis. As it is, no other Eton composer equals his technical resource or imagination. But there are still a couple of his motets left to record: dare we hope for a Vol 5? **Fabrice Fitch**

# REISSUES

**Peter Quantrill** on a pair of 'Icon' boxes featuring Prêtre and Jordan *père*, and **James Jolly** on a Haydn marathon

## Francophone icons

In France, Japan and belatedly Vienna, **Georges Prêtre** has enjoyed a status worthy of inclusion in Warner Classics' 'Icon' series. His reputation in English-speaking countries as a useful 'studio' conductor is largely borne out by this uneven collection of orchestral recordings made for EMI (about £32).

The start of Prêtre's career coincided with an early working relationship with Maria Callas, near the end of hers, and if her *Carmen* and second recording of *Tosca* are still prized, it is not on account of the conducting. However, Herbert von Karajan had been sufficiently impressed to offer him what became his professional breakthrough moment: *Capriccio* at the Vienna State Opera. Another mentor, André Cluytens, quickly perceived in Prêtre the rhythmic freedom (or 'bad, old habit of unstable tempi', according to the late Alan Blyth) which would vex *Gramophone* critics down the decades.

In a 2008 interview, Prêtre himself shrugged off the criticism by recalling how Poulenc had told him to do as he pleased in a recording session for the *Gloria*: 'Don't fret yourself over my instructions.' Unfortunately, the set excludes most of his Poulenc recordings, but *Les biches* and *Les animaux modèles* are the best of Prêtre: genial, quick-witted and perfectly at home with the composer's musical voltes-faces from phrase to phrase. Peter Ustinov joins the fun for *L'histoire du Babar* in both French and English, and the coupling is rare but no less cute, a chamber-scale setting of the Grimms' *Brave Little Tailor* by Tibor Harsányi.

Modernism was never Prêtre's *tasse de thé*. There are three earnest, tidily orchestrated symphonies by Boulez's nemesis at French radio, Marcel Landowski, and an important, thoroughly prepared first stereo recording of Dutilleux's early ballet *Le loup*. Much else in the box could be summed up as timbrally characterful but rhythmically

slipshod, such as Monte Carlo albums of Milhaud and d'Indy, and symphonies of Berlioz and Saint-Saëns with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

Some of his best work was done early, especially in front of Walter Legge's Philharmonia Orchestra and then the RPO post-Beecham. Two Russian CDs from this time include brusquely paced, brashly poster-painted Borodin, Rimsky and Mussorgsky, and a raw, full-throttle Tchaikovsky Fifth. The first recording of Shostakovich's Twelfth is, perhaps understandably, a dutiful trudge.

Prêtre's background as a jazz trumpeter lends swing and sizzle to the accompaniments for Gershwin's Concerto in F and the *Rhapsody in Blue*, even if soloist Daniel Wayenberg didn't get the memo – or the piano tuner in. Intonation beyond what could be called typically 'French' wrecks an earlier Saint-Saëns *Organ Symphony*, both within the Paris Conservatoire orchestra and in balance with Maurice Duruflé's solo part. I wonder if anyone (Prêtre, the original producer or the remastering engineer) really cared.

There is surprisingly little overlap with the set of Erato recordings conducted by **Armin Jordan**. This is a more thoughtfully planned compilation (about £25) paying tribute to an altogether more serious musician. Fine editorial tributes from his son, the conductor Philippe, and the writer Jean-Charles Hoffelé emphasise his advocacy of under-appreciated music, which on Erato focused naturally on French composers. Like Prêtre, Jordan could be less than scrupulous about production values in the studio – noises off and some casual attitudes to wind balancing are commonplace – but he often chooses a more subdued mode of expression which comes off even in extrovert works such as *La mer* and *Íberia*.

Going through the set has been like drinking a mixed case of mature wines. Sustained exposure to the grand cru

symphonies and tone-poems of Franck, Dukas and Chausson brought deep pleasure and a post-Wagnerian hangover, which was lifted in a trice by dry-as-a-bone Chabrier and honeyed Fauré. Their major orchestral works are comprehensively represented, as are Debussy and Ravel, with the meat of the work done by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. The orchestra's collective profile is more solid and compact than under Ansermet's tenure, but lemon-scented breezes of flute and oboe in the chamber-scale works call the old maestro to mind: *Le tombeau de Couperin*, *Ma Mère l'Oye* and not forgetting Ansermet's own orchestration of Debussy's *Six Epigraphes antiques*. François-René Duchâble is an incisive, coruscating soloist in the Ravel piano concertos.

The strength of both conductors in opera and vocal music is largely ignored, but the Jordan 'Icon' does include Rachel Yakar in *Shéhérazade* – more lightly floated than many rivals, reflecting the soprano's experience in early music – and Philippe Huttonlocher, the uncredited baritone in *Don Quichotte* (there are some peculiar ideas about titling and translation in both sets: when did you last hear *Jeux* called a 'Dance Poem'?).

The final disc is more than a *bonne bouche*: rarely heard, exquisite and exotic song-cycles by Delage and Jaubert with the Kammerensemble of Paris and Felicity Lott on top form, making each note a hint, a smile or an arched eyebrow. 'Moody stuff', remarked Patrick O'Connor of the original release in May 1997, citing Jaubert's setting of Apollinaire in the first of the Three Serenades, 'in which the poet talks of submarines in his soul'. Do listen for yourself. **Peter Quantrill**

### THE RECORDINGS

#### **Armin Jordan: The French Symphonic Recordings**

Erato 'Icon' ⑪ 9029 59535-3

#### **Georges Prêtre: The Symphonic Recordings**

Erato 'Icon' ⑫ 9029 59535-2

# Le tout Haydn



Haydn at home: Christopher Hogwood conducts the Academy of Ancient Music at Eszterháza Palace

**H**aydn didn't make life easy for the record companies: with 104 numbered symphonies to his name, he provided quite a challenge (and an expensive one at that). The 'traditional' instrument era gave us complete cycles from Antal Dorati (Decca), Adam Fischer (Nimbus) and Dennis Russell Davies (Sony Classical) – Ernst Maerzendorfer's 1960s cycle, made for LP, has never been on CD, though you can download it from an enthusiast's website. Come the period-instrument age and many companies set off on a road paved with good intentions: Hyperion started a series with the Hanover Band and Roy Goodman, but the plug was pulled after 58 symphonies. Decca's L'Oiseau-Lyre series featuring the Academy of Ancient Music under Christopher Hogwood got a little further, with 77 of the symphonies recorded in the intended new cycle (he'd previously recorded four of the 'London' symphonies). A case of so near and yet so far, perhaps... until Decca's Paul Moseley realised that if you supplemented the Hogwood series with Frans Brüggen's Philips recordings, with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, of Nos 82 to 104, there'd be a

small gap of just four symphonies, Nos 78 to 81, which, if added, would make this the first complete Haydn symphony set on period instruments. A phone-call to Ottavio Dantone and his Accademia Bizantina and that hole was filled – and with great style (as Lindsay Kemp discussed in March when the four symphonies came out individually in a separate two-CD set).

So how do these three different approaches to Haydn sit alongside each other? Hogwood's approach in the earlier symphonies revelled in the virtuosity of a small, court-sized orchestra, and he made an editorial point of using the first versions of the symphonies (so high horns in the *Maria Theresia*, for example, and no trumpets or drums in some of the other ceremonial symphonies such as the much underrated No 75). Harpsichord continuo was eschewed as no record of a keyboard player has been discovered at the Esterházy establishment – apart from Haydn himself, who directed from the violin. Frans Brüggen also performed without a keyboard in his live recordings of the later symphonies with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century and employed larger forces – appropriate for these very

public works. These are played with a great deal of swing and a virility that often seems missing in some other performances, not to mention a recreative imagination that really draws the listener in. His studio *Sturm und Drang* symphonies with the OAE are full of the same verve, even if they may have been surpassed more recently by the likes of Giovanni Antonini, not to mention (on modern instruments) Thomas Fey.

On the other hand, Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music – often derided at the time for what was perceived as a clinical 'house style' – certainly exude an air of 'correctness' (especially in the very early symphonies) that perhaps pushes a sense of enjoyment of the music into second place. However, once they got into their stride, you sense them really clicking with the music, almost as if each successive symphony they tackled was an eagerly awaited new challenge. Symphonies Nos 76 and 77 were recorded just as the project was drawn to its premature close and only appeared a decade later on a magazine cover disc. It was worth the wait, though, as these two works – which appear 'officially' for the first time in this set – are chock-full of the finest points of Hogwood's adventure into Haydn.

You may have glanced at the box or the listing below and asked yourself why 107, not 104? Well, the London-period *Sinfonia concertante* is often known as No 105, and there are two early symphonies called 'A' and 'B' (they're in the Hogwood sequence). Not only that, but Decca includes JP Salomon's chamber versions of the *Surprise*, *Military* and *London* in deliciously sprightly performances by Hogwood (fortepiano), flautist Lisa Beznosiuk and the Salomon Quartet (members of the AAM). And there are also three duplicated symphonies – versions by both Brüggen and Hogwood of the *Military*, *London* and *Miracle*, this latter from the AAM one of the finest recordings of any Haydn symphony.

The set contains an excellent and extensive booklet by David Threasher, who does what you always hope anyone writing about Haydn will do – encourage you to listen to all those symphonies that don't have nicknames but which promise (and deliver) so many opportunities to marvel at Haydn's boundless creativity. If you hunt around you can find the set listed for £65 – an astounding bargain. **James Jolly**

## THE RECORDING

### Haydn: 107 Symphonies

Hogwood, Dantone, Brüggen  
Decca (35 discs) 478 9604

# Opera



Mike Ashman reviews the latest instalment in Naxos's Ring cycle:

*'Matthias Goerne is in almost indecently good voice, helped no doubt by the recording conditions'* ▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**

## Berg

### Wozzeck

**Christian Gerhaher** bar.....Wozzeck  
**Gun-Brit Barkmin** sop.....Marie  
**Brandon Jovanovich** ten.....Drum Major  
**Mauro Peter** ten.....Andres  
**Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke** ten.....Captain  
**Lars Woldt** bass.....Doctor  
**Chorus of Zurich Opera; Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi**  
Stage director **Andreas Homoki**  
Video director **Michael Beyer**  
Accentus (F) ACC20363; (F) ACC10363  
(101' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,  
DTS 5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)  
Recorded live, September 2015



Wozzeck sees red: the red moon; a bloody knife; flames in the sky. Zurich Opera's production, directed by Andreas Homoki, is washed in radiation-yellow, a sickly glow evoked by lighting designer Franck Evin that might look painterly were it not such a chemical shade of jaundice. It picks out where real cheeks, chins and noses meet the cracked, heavy white facepaint on the characters' faces. Caught in close-up by Michael Beyer's sensitive video direction, perhaps you glimpse more human reaction than Homoki really wants you to see.

Büchner's drama, *Woyzeck*, was written in the 1830s but reclaimed by expressionists in the 20th century. Homoki offers a synthesis between the two worlds. A puppet theatre – the costumes and wigs say English seaside more than central European marionettes – is conjured up through Michael Levine's ingenious set: concentric wooden frames from which characters can appear and disappear as if manipulated by giant unseen hands. As the world slides away from Wozzeck – 'it's an abyss, I feel dizzy', the soldier complains – so even this precarious perspective crumbles. It's also a reminder that, just as the set can be shuffled, so can the drama itself, because



Büchner's scrambled collection of scenes had no obvious order.

This is a finely honed production that follows its premise to an absurdist conclusion with slick theatricality and dispassionate zeal. The children in the final scene are all sinister doll-like versions of the adult characters. They include a pint-size, preening Captain (with tricorn) and the Drum Major, whose own plus-size headgear is set off by a tumescent plume. Marie (Gun-Brit Barkmin) is a wide-eyed Victorian strumpet with scarlet rag-doll hair; her and Wozzeck's child is a true puppet, blank eyes in its wooden head.

All sentimentalism is banished here. So, largely, is the opera's plea for justice and compassion. It is left to Christian Gerhaher's Wozzeck to fight that battle, which he does with formidable diction and great lyrical beauty, offering, where he can, a still centre in the tumult. Perhaps the baritone has come to the role a shade too late; there's a world-weariness here that suggests this soldier had long since given up the fight. Barkmin shines, at least vocally, with a bright *jugendlich-dramatischer* sound that she stretches to raw, raddled contrition as the screw turns.

Brandon Jovanovich's muscular tenor gives (sorry) real thrust to his priapic Drum Major, and Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke's Captain sings with silky venom. The dramatic chiaroscuro comes from the orchestra. Fabio Luisi's incisive conducting slices artfully between Berg's fatty cuts of late Romanticism (I'm sure I've never heard Baron Ochs join the waltz at the Heuriger tavern) and his queasy dissonances and eerie number-games. The orchestra, rapier-sharp and cutting to the quick, offer much more than Swiss precision.

**Neil Fisher**

## Britten

### A Midsummer Night's Dream

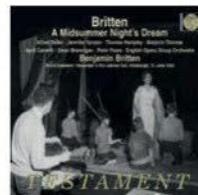
**Jennifer Vyvyan** sop.....Tytania  
**Alfred Deller** counterten.....Oberon  
**April Cantelo** sop.....Helena  
**Marjorie Thomas** contr.....Hermia



Hugo Shirley listens to the debut disc from soprano Pretty Yende:

*'It soon becomes clear...that hers is a lyric coloratura voice of real beauty and flexibility'* ▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

**Johanna Peters** mez.....Hippolyta  
**George Maran** ten.....Lysander  
**Owen Brannigan** bass.....Bottom  
**Peter Pears** ten.....Flute  
**Edward Byles** ten.....Snout  
**Thomas Hemsley** bar.....Demetrius  
**Joseph Ward** ten.....Starveling  
**Norman Lumsden** bass.....Quince  
**David Kelly** bass.....Snug  
**Forbes Robinson** bass.....Theseus  
**Leonide Massine II** spkr.....Puck  
**English Opera Group Orchestra / Benjamin Britten**  
Testament mono (F) (2) SBT2 1515 (138' • ADD)  
Recorded live at the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh,  
June 11, 1960



Only 300 people could fit into Aldeburgh's tiny Jubilee Hall for the premiere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1960. Thanks to the BBC's live radio broadcast and Testament's excellent remastering of it, we can now join them. Decca's commercial recording has been the standard for the opera since it was released in 1966, and most listeners will prefer it for its fine studio sound and the absence of audience noise, but the opportunity to listen in to the premiere is an experience no Britten lover will want to miss.

In the first place this is an earlier version of the score, hot from the composer's writing desk. The differences may be small – Snug has a swaggering song as the Lion in 'Pyramus and Thisbe' and there are changes in key and accompaniment elsewhere – but it is good to have Britten's first thoughts in performance. Secondly, we get to hear the original cast, which involves some significant Britten collaborators who did not make it on to the Decca recording. Prime among these is Jennifer Vyvyan, the Governess in Decca's *The Turn of the Screw*, who makes a Tytania of pinpoint subtlety. Of the lovers, three – April Cantelo's Helena, Marjorie Thomas's Hermia and George Maran's gently sung Lysander –



A finely honed production makes for a memorable *Wozzeck*, starring Christian Gerhaher, on Accentus

are new, and a well-balanced quartet they make. Leonide Massine II is a Puck of otherworldly, pensive tone; and Peter Pears is heard in the role of Flute rather than Lysander as on the Decca recording (Hugues Cuénod, originally intended as Flute, had not been free to take part). This means that Pears also has to come on in female dress as Thisbe, a moment that is greeted with hilarity among the audience. A tolerable amount of stage and audience noise is present throughout.

With the exception of a wayward band of fairies – the boys manage to get lost in the first five minutes – the cast play as an ensemble with remarkable detail. Alfred Deller, especially, is in excellent voice as Oberon, risking softer singing than would be possible anywhere else. In the intimate Jubilee Hall the English Opera Group Orchestra's small band of 27 players cast a spell of almost chamber-like fantasy. Some prominent instrumentalists of the day were in its ranks and, though the playing is not immaculate, Britten leads his forces with tremendous rhythmic verve – even more than on the Decca recording. I hope the lucky 300 knew what they were witnessing.

**Richard Fairman**

*Selected comparison:*  
Britten (5/67<sup>th</sup>, 5/90) (DECC) 425 663-2LH2

## Glinka

### Ruslan and Lyudmila

**Mikhail Petrenko** bass..... Ruslan

**Albina Shagimuratova** sop..... Lyudmila

**Vladimir Ognovenko** bass..... Svetozar

**Yuri Minenko** counteren..... Ratmir

**Almas Svilpa** bass-bar..... Farlaf

**Alexandrina Pendatchanska** sop..... Gorislava

**Charles Workman** ten..... Finn/Bayan

**Elena Zaremba** mez..... Naina

**Alexandre Polkovnikov** bar..... The Head

**State Academic Bolshoi Theatre of Russia Chorus**

**and Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski**

**Stage director** Dmitri Tcherniakov

**Video director** François Duplat

Bel Air Classiques ① ② DVD BAC120 (3h 17' + 35')

NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s

Recorded live, November 2011

Bonus: Interview with Dmitri Tcherniakov



As the curtains part during Glinka's whiplash Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, the Bolshoi audience breaks into applause. Is it relief? The sky-blue dome, like a Fabergé egg interior, and sumptuous period costumes appear to indicate a traditionally safe production. They should know better. This is Dmitri

Tcherniakov, *enfant terrible* of Russian directors, whose 2006 production of *Eugene Onegin* was so controversial that the great soprano Galina Vishnevskaya vowed never to set foot inside the Bolshoi again. Tcherniakov doesn't do safe.

We're at the wedding feast of Ruslan and Lyudmila, and everything looks as conservative as Lotfi Mansouri's cardboard cutout staging for the Mariinsky Opera (filmed for Philips in 1995, conducted by Valery Gergiev). Rear panels seem to be rich tapestries but are soon revealed to be video screens...and then a cameraman wanders into shot. It's a film set, and when Lyudmila is abducted during a power blackout, it all seems part of a ruse; but we soon realise that it's part of a bigger game, a struggle between sorcerers Finn and Naina, putting to the test Naina's argument that true love does not exist. Ruslan – along with two suitors Lyudmila rejected – are sent on a quest to rescue the bride. It's a quest Ruslan eventually wins when he discovers Lyudmila trapped in a weird sanatorium where she is 'entertained' by a white-suited violinist, chefs juggling knives, a parrot and an onstage glass harmonica player (Glinka drawing on *Lucia di Lammermoor*'s mad scene?). She is returned to the film set, where an injection from Finn brings her back to her senses.

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'A fascinating work, superbly done': Patrick Davin and soloists perform *La Jacquerie* at the Auditorium de Radio France, Paris, earlier this year

Tcherniakov retains all Glinka's music, including a ballet sequence in which scantily clad ladies show off party tricks, rhythmic gymnastics, rollerskating, plus a conga. One can forgive Mikhail Petrenko's Ruslan for looking a tad bemused. Petrenko's soft bass makes for a warmly sympathetic Ruslan, especially moving in his Act 2 aria as he surveys the dead at a deserted battlefield ahead of his encounter with the disembodied head of one of the evil Chernomor's victims, here represented on a big screen. Albina Shagimuratova copes well with the coloratura of Lyudmila's teasing wedding feast aria, although she's not as charming as a (very) young Anna Netrebko for Gergiev, as then unknown outside Russia. Shagimuratova's laser-like attack is superb in Act 4 and she acts the suicidal bride convincingly.

Tcherniakov's got another surprise up his sleeve. One of Lyudmila's rejected suitors, Ratmir, a mezzo role, is cast as a countertenor. Yuri Minenko sings beautifully, with warm, supple tone as the women of the 'harem' conjured up by Naina tend to the bloodied, muddy Ruslan. In this modern setting, a mezzo Ratmir would look implausible – Gergiev has the redoubtable Larissa Diadkova in a beard – but Tcherniakov's bold move pays off.

Charles Workman is a light-voiced, sympathetic Finn and Alex Penda's dark dramatic soprano suits Gorislava, Ratmir's former lover. Vladimir Jurowski conducts an urgent account of Glinka's colourful score. Recommended for an entertaining, if weird, staging. **Mark Pullinger**

*Selected comparison:*

Gergiev (9/03) (PHIL) **2PM** 075 096-9PH2

## Lalo/Coquard

### La Jacquerie

**Véronique Gens** sop.....Blanche de Sainte-Croix

**Nora Gubisch** mez.....Jeanne

**Charles Castronovo** ten.....Robert

**Boris Pinkhasovich** bar.....Guillaume

**Jean-Sébastien Bou** bar....Le Comte de Sainte-Croix

**Patrick Bolleire** bass.....Le Sénéchal

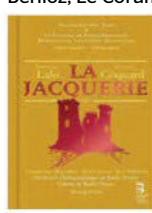
**Enguerrand de Hys** ten .....Le Baron de Savigny

**Radio France Chorus and Philharmonic Orchestra**

**/ Patrick Davin**

Ediciones Singulaires **2** ES1023

(113' • DDD • S/T/t). Recorded live at the Opéra Berlioz, Le Corum, Montpellier, July 24, 2015



First performed in Monte Carlo in 1895, *La Jacquerie* is almost invariably described as Lalo's last

opera, though the bulk of it is by Arthur Coquard (1846-1910), who undertook to finish the score at the request of Lalo's family after he died suddenly in 1892, leaving only the first act complete.

Intended as an expression of Lalo's fiercely republican sympathies, the opera deals with the historical Jacquerie – a 14th-century peasant revolt against aristocratic oppression, during which the rebels proudly called themselves 'the Jacques', a term derived from the epithet 'Jacques Bonhomme' used as an expression of contempt towards the peasantry by their feudal overlords. The narrative examines the morality and psychology of revolution through the character of the ideologue Robert and his relationships with three people who influence his career: his mother Jeanne, who lives in terror that his beliefs will eventually bring about his death; the nihilist Guillaume, who advocates a politics of revenge rather than social justice; and Blanche, the convent-educated daughter of the Comte de Sainte-Croix, who, unaware of Robert's identity, falls in love with him while nursing him back to health after he is injured in a street fight. Early critics were quick to point out overtones of *Le prophète*

in the central mother-son relationship, and of *Tristan* in the lovers' back-story.

Lalo's first act is characterised by the streamlined, expressive conciseness familiar from *Le roi d'Ys*, though it also redeploys material from his earlier opera *Fiesque* (1867), which remained unperformed in his lifetime. Coquard's completion forms a successful musico-dramatic unit, yet one notices divergences from as well as similarities to Lalo's compositional method. The second act, containing Robert's rabble-rousing aria with chorus and a powerful duet with his mother, replicates Lalo's no-note-wasted style. Thereafter, Coquard becomes more spacious, as echoes of post-Meyerbeerian grand opera creep in.

Both the Act 3 ballet and the subsequent duet between Blanche and her father feel lengthy after all that has gone before, and Act 4 is dominated by two expansive set pieces, a beautiful scene for Blanche and Jeanne, now allies as the revolution collapses, followed by the lovers' long-delayed duet, which builds slowly and ecstatically as the pair await the final catastrophe. Throughout Coquard deploys the Wagnerian touches that Lalo introduces at the start – Nibelung-type rhythms to underpin Guillaume's utterances, a *Tristan*-esque cor anglais solo that accompanies moments of exhausted stasis. His choral writing, one notices, is considerably more contrapuntal than Lalo's.

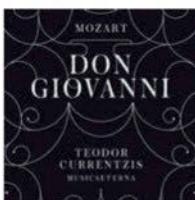
The opera was a *succès d'estime* in its day, with productions in Lyon and Paris following on from its premiere. Thereafter it sank into obscurity until its revival last year in concert by Radio France, under the auspices of Palazetto Bru Zane, in Paris and Montpellier, where this live recording was made. Conducted by Patrick Davin, it has a restless energy that draws you in and keeps you engaged throughout. The playing is richly detailed, the choral singing fiercely committed and there are some fine central performances. Charles Castronovo's Robert is all persuasive elegance and ringing high notes: you believe in him as a charismatic revolutionary, and he brings real passion to his scenes with Véronique Gens's smoky toned Blanche, who is equally convincing as a refined aristocrat, questioning her own moral values as her world slowly crumbles around her. Nora Gubisch's Jeanne makes up in intensity for what she sometimes lacks in steadiness, and the two baritones are nicely contrasted: Boris Pinkhasovich's Guillaume sounds very baleful and obsessive; Jean-Sébastien Bou's Comte

gradually strips back the layers of hauteur to reveal the man's essential vulnerability. The recording itself is scrupulously balanced, with only the final applause to remind us it was made live. A fascinating work, superbly done. **Tim Ashley**

## Mozart

### Don Giovanni

Dimitris Tiliakos	bar	.....	Don Giovanni
Myrtò Papatanasiu	sop	.....	Donna Anna
Karina Gauvin	sop	.....	Donna Elvira
Christina Gansch	sop	.....	Zerlina
Kenneth Tarver	ten	.....	Don Ottavio
Vito Priante	bar	.....	Leporello
Guido Loconsolo	bar	.....	Masetto
Mika Kares	bass	.....	Commendatore
<b>MusicAeterna (Chorus and Orchestra of the Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre) / Teodor Currentzis</b>			
Sony Classical F ③ 88985 31603-2			
(169' • DDD• S/T/t)			



The previous instalments in Theodor Currentzis's survey of the Mozart-da Ponte operas tended to be enthralling and exasperating by turns. His *Don Giovanni*, always designed as the crowning final release, we're told, follows the pattern, while also throwing an extra dash of disappointment into the mix.

This seems in large part to be due to the conductor's strange attitude towards authenticity, as expounded in an occasionally insightful, intermittently somewhat batty interview in the lavish hardback book that houses the release. There he bemoans the infiltration of 19th-century *bel canto* manners into Mozart singing, and suggests that something more rustic and folksy is what's required for certain numbers.

Some more eccentric ideas include the assertion that there was nothing between *Don Giovanni* and *Wozzeck* in that particular modernist line, as well as a strong implication that the second half of the Act 2 finale – after Don Giovanni's damnation – was added for the opera's Vienna performances (it wasn't). What we get here, incidentally, is the standard conflation of Prague and Vienna versions, with the added dubious bonus of Zerlina and Masetto's 'bondage' duet in Act 2, 'Per queste tue manine'.

Currentzis also explains how he set out to create a recording that would produce enough sense of theatre for home listening. In doing so, he has clearly spent an enormous amount of time with his orchestra: there's hardly a note from them that doesn't feel as though it's been carefully

removed, cleaned, polished and replaced. The results are bracing, with a vibrancy and visceral buzz that is often undeniably exciting. Listen to the springy introduction to 'Ah! chi mi dice mai', for example, to the raucous storm whipped up in the accompaniment to the Champagne aria, or the fiercely articulated string playing that accompanies the chorus of demons in the Act 2 finale. When Don Giovanni fights the Commendatore at the start, you can almost hear the clatter of sabres.

But while faster sections bristle with energy – often feeling very fast, rushed even – Currentzis lets the tension drop in the less dramatic moments. All momentum is allowed to dissipate, for example, at Don Ottavio's 'Or che tutti' in the Act 2 finale, while the 'Non ti fidar, o misera' quartet in Act 1 is almost perversely docile. Recitative throughout is slow, under-projected and strangely internalised. Indeed, in contrast to the playing he elicits from his orchestra, Currentzis seems generally to have encouraged his principals either to undersing, rein in their voices or espouse resolutely neutral-sounding characterisations – or all three. Singers trained in a post-*bel canto* age here, therefore, have to sing according to the rules of what, one is left to infer, their conductor imagines as a pre-*bel canto* age of innocence. But it's never clear what that really represents: much is stripped away; very little, apart from some modest ornamentation and rustic additions in the orchestra, is offered in its stead.

So we have a very pleasantly sung *Don Giovanni* from the Greek baritone Dimitris Tiliakos, but one that never really communicates much charisma. Vito Priante's Leporello is in many ways excellent but is likewise prevented from developing his characterisation in the slow recitatives. Kenneth Tarver sings pleasingly as a lyrical Don Ottavio, but Myrtò Papatanasiu's Donna Anna is small-scale and short on any aristocratic *grandezza*. Karina Gauvin, so fiery in Baroque repertoire, allows Donna Elvira's character to shine through only intermittently, and similarly seems to be reining her voice in. Christina Gansch is a very respectable Zerlina (and turns in a lovely 'Batti, batti'); but there's a definite sense of the differences between these three women – their respective positions on the social scale so clearly delineated by Mozart and da Ponte – having been ironed out. Guido Loconsolo and Mika Kares complete the cast well enough as Masetto and the Commendatore.

Production values are very high, Sony's sound is outstanding, and in some ways this set forms a fitting conclusion to a variable series. It's certainly worth hearing once,

and maybe dipping into a couple of extra times after that. It's an uneven achievement based on some unconvincing interpretative ideas, though, and not a *Don Giovanni* to live with. **Hugo Shirley**

## Mozart

**Così fan tutte** - Un'aura amorosa del nostro tesoro. **Don Giovanni** - Dalla sua pace; Il mio tesoro intanto. **Die Entführung aus dem Serail** - Ich baue ganz auf deine Stärke; Konstanze, dich wiederzusehen!...O wie ängstlich. **Idomeneo** - Fuor del mar ho un mar in seno; Non ho colpa. **Die Zauberflöte** - Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön; Die Weisheitlehre dieser Knaben; Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton. Misero! O sogno... Aura che intorno spiri, K431  
**Pavol Breslik ten** \*José van Dam bar  
**Munich Radio Orchestra / Patrick Lange**  
Orfeo (F) C889 161A (56' • DDD)



Pavol Breslik, the Tamino on the Simon Rattle/Robert Carsen DVD of *Die Zauberflöte* from Baden-Baden (EuroArts, 12/13) here presents a selection of Mozart arias. Ranging from *Idomeneo* to *Die Zauberflöte* itself, it complements the disc that Jeremy Ovenden made under the title of 'Mozart: An Italian Journey', praised by David Vickers (Signum, A/11). That recording, of course, doesn't include anything in German. In 'Konstanze, dich wiederzusehen!' from *Die Entführung*, Breslik captures Belmonte's excitement, slightly spoilt by a perfunctory ending. He manages a good *crescendo* in the reprise of 'Ich baue ganz'; it's not his fault that the glorious woodwind writing is insufficiently prominent. In the *Flute*, 'Dies Bildnis' is on the brisk side; the exchange with the Speaker finds the septuagenarian José van Dam in good voice, but surely Orfeo and Bavarian Radio between them could have afforded a chorus? Tamino responds to reassurances that we don't actually hear.

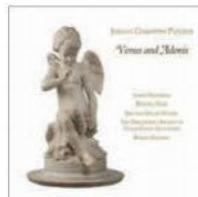
'Dalla sua pace', composed for the Vienna revival of *Don Giovanni*, is beautifully, lyrically sung. Breslik also manages the runs in 'Il mio tesoro' very well. It's a light, speedy performance, all right in its way, but it would have been even better had Breslik followed his 'great role model': Fritz Wunderlich, in a live performance under Karajan, is more leisurely, much to the aria's advantage.

The disc opens with Idamante's first aria: fresh and lively, with ear-tickling playing from the B flat *alto* horns. It's followed immediately by Idomeneo's 'Fuor del mar' in its original, full version. Breslik is a bit wild – in fact he is often quite slack,

rhythmically – and not really heroic. On a disc lasting under 56 minutes, it's a pity that room wasn't found for the preceding accompanied recitative, not to mention 'Vedrommi intorno'. Like Jeremy Ovenden, Breslik includes *Misero! O sogno*, a concert aria written for Valentin Adamberger, the first Belmonte. It makes a fine conclusion to a pleasant but not especially characterful recording. **Richard Lawrence**

## Pepusch

**Venus and Adonis**  
**Clara Hendrick** *mez* ..... Venus  
**Philippa Hyde** *sop* ..... Adonis  
**Richard Edgar-Wilson** *ten* ..... Mars  
**The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen / Robert Rawson**  
Rameé (F) RAM1502 (85' • DDD • T/t)



Music in England between Purcell's death and Handel's arrival 15 years later remains a black hole except to a handful of specialists. By 1704 the Berliner Johann Christoph Pepusch settled permanently in London, where he was responsible for the composition or compilation of various theatre entertainments; later on he was music director for the first Duke of Chandos (for whom Handel composed several early English masterpieces at around the same time), and he provided music for Gay's political satire *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Pepusch's more ambitious works have been somewhat ignored by scholars and performers alike – so hats off to The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen for this enjoyable account of *Venus and Adonis*, a masque first performed as an afterpiece at Drury Lane in 1715. The scholar-performer and project director Robert Rawson calls it 'a full-blooded *opera seria* in miniature', and it turns out that the score has several fascinating parallels with Handel's *Acis and Galatea* (Cannons, 1718), in which Pepusch might have played violin: a few of its comparable elements are a pair of oboes cascading limpidly over shapely strings and crisp continuo in the fine overture, and soprano recorder chirrups in Venus's 'Chirping warblers'.

Adonis's jolly hunting song 'How pleasant is ranging the fields' is sung blithely by Philippa Hyde, whose florid passages sparkle articulately in 'Cease your vain teasing' (an assertive minor-key complaint that could almost pass for Handel in its contrapuntal ritornellos). Venus's entrance in a chariot is performed with radiant sweetness by Ciara Hendrick ('Ah! sweet Adonis'), and the

goddess's complaint that Adonis appears uninterested in her charms is an impeccable juxtaposition of imperious authority and pathos ('Cupid! Cupid! bend thy bow'). The jealous Mars is sung nimbly by Richard Edgar-Wilson at the very bottom of his range; a quarrelsome duet for Venus and Mars is dramatically vivid. The climax is slow creeping music with recorders for Adonis's death scene ('O! welcome! gentle death!') and Venus's anguished reaction in a turbulent accompanied recitative and aria ('Arise! black storms and tempests'). If a contest is sought, then Handel (not to mention John Blow) clearly wins – but this excellent recording reveals that Pepusch is a significantly better composer than is normally assumed. **David Vickers**

## Rachmaninov

**'Troika'** DVD  
**Aleko**  
**Kostas Smoriginas** *bass-bar* ..... Aleko  
**Sergey Semishkur** *ten* ..... Young Gypsy  
**Alexander Vassiliev** *bass* ..... Old Gypsy  
**Anna Nechaeva** *sop* ..... Zemfira  
**Yaroslava Kozina** *mez* ..... Gypsy Woman

## The Miserly Knight

**Sergei Leiferkus** *bar* ..... Baron  
**Dmitry Golovnin** *ten* ..... Albert  
**Ilya Silchukov** *bar* ..... Duke  
**Alexander Kravets** *ten* ..... Moneylender  
**Alexander Vassiliev** *bass* ..... Servant

## Francesca da Rimini

**Dimitris Tiliakos** *bar* ..... Lanceotto Malatesta  
**Anna Nechaeva** *sop* ..... Francesca  
**Sergey Semishkur** *ten* ..... Paolo  
**Alexander Vassiliev** *bass* ..... Virgil's Shade  
**Dmitry Golovnin** *ten* ..... Dante

**Chorus and Symphony Orchestra of La Monnaie, Brussels / Mikhail Tatarnikov**

*Stage director* **Kirsten Dehlholm**  
*Video director* **Christian Leblé**  
Bel Air Classiques (F) ② DVD BAC133  
(3h 5' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)  
Recorded live, June 2015



To see any of Rachmaninov's three one-act operas staged in the opera house is a rare enough event but to have all three – the 'troika' – in the same evening should be a red-letter day. Although tempted, I'm now glad I didn't venture to Brussels last year for La Monnaie's new staging by Danish director Kirsten Dehlholm as it's only really a production in the loosest sense of the word. La Monnaie had been closed for



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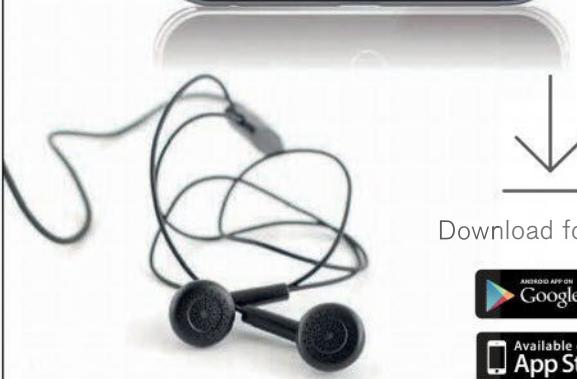
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Jaap van Zweden conducts the second instalment - *Die Walküre* - of Naxos's Hong Kong-based Ring cycle

renovation and during that period the exiled company relocated to different venues, alighting at Belgium's Théâtre National for this Rachmaninov trilogy. Dehholm's production is a sorry excuse for a staging, barely a step up from a costumed concert performance: costumed oratorio rather than opera. The orchestra is placed on the stage, with singers tiered behind, apart from in *The Miserly Knight*, where they're placed in front of a translucent scrim.

*Aleko*, a student work based on Pushkin, is decked in a kaleidoscope of psychedelic videography, flower-power costumes, brightly coloured wigs and painted faces like dolls (seasick green for Sergey Semishkur's Young Gypsy). Giant tarot cards descend for this tale of gypsy lore but movement is limited to Japanese-style kabuki gestures. When Aleko discovers his wife and her young lover, he slowly lays a fist on the tenor's shoulder to murder him. Kostas Smoriginas is a stentorian Aleko, a favourite Chaliapin role, and Anna Nechaeva proves a fearless Zemfira.

Rachmaninov's ashen score to *The Miserly Knight* broods nicely under Mikhail Tatarnikov's direction but the staging again puzzles. Albert, the grasping knight's impoverished son, is in a crumpled fat-suit, all the characters with feet of concrete

slabs. Dehholm uses video footage of the knight – flinty baritone Sergei Leiferkus – in his cellar, fondling gold bars. Leiferkus is still in fine voice but his knight is already available on video from Glyndebourne. Alexander Kravets proves a fine Mime-style wheedling moneylender.

*Francesca da Rimini* is the strongest opera of Rachmaninov's trilogy. Dehholm stages it with similar costumes to *Aleko* but with colour drained to simple black and white. It looks more like a zebra crossing than Dante's second circle of hell. Clouds scud across the frontcloth while Paolo, Francesca and Lanceotto are restricted to slow motion Robert Wilson-like semaphore, where the height of ecstasy results in tame hand-holding – a crying shame when the vocal performances are so strong. Dimitris Tiliakos, clad in chainmail, is a gnarly Lanceotto Malatesta (an old Leiferkus role), while Nechaeva is a powerful Francesca and Semishkur – looking distinctly unimpressed with his beige bald cap – rings out confidently as Paolo.

Tatarnikov leads a muscular account of the score, although his groans are distracting. The Monnaie orchestra play with tremendous verve but BelAir's horrible, boxy sound is another deterrent to enjoyment in this disappointing release. **Mark Pullinger**

## Wagner

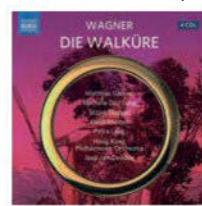
### Die Walküre

Stuart Skelton	ten	Siegmund
Heidi Melton	sop	Sieglinde
Petra Lang	sop	Brünnhilde
Matthias Goerne	bär	Wotan
Michelle De Young	mez	Fricka
Falk Struckmann	bass-bar	Hunding
Katherine Broderick	sop	Helmwige
Elaine McKrill	sop	Ortlinde
Sarah Castle	mez	Waltraute
Laura Nykänen	mez	Rossweisse
Aurhelia Varak	mez	Siegrune
Okka von der Dammerau	mez	Grimgerde
Anna Burford	mez	Schwertleite

**Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra / Jaap van Zweden**

Naxos ④ 8 660394/7; ⑤ NBD0051  
(3h 57' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall, January 21 & 23, 2016



The second instalment of Naxos's live Hong Kong concert *Ring* is more compelling than last year's respectable but careful *Das Rheingold* (11/15). Most noticeably, Jaap van Zweden has broken

free of both tradition and over-literal score-reading to interpret what is in front of him. Now he's not afraid with either his singers or his players to vary tempi and dynamics quite radically according to the drama of the libretto.

Thus Heidi Melton's generous-voiced Sieglinde is given all the space in the world to make the narration about the twins' father Wotan the high point of Act 1 that it should be – a result only slightly hindered by Naxos's microphones seeming less sympathetic to her enunciation than, say, Bavarian Radio's were at Bayreuth last summer. Van Zweden follows up by allowing Stuart Skelton's accurate and virile Siegmund equal space in 'Heiligste Minne, höchste Not' to prepare the drawing of the sword from the tree. He then wraps up the act – to hell with written instructions – with an all-out gallop to the final curtain.

Similarly, in Acts 2 and 3, the chosen tempi regularly contrast slow, grand (and self-doubting) Wotan with swift, instinctive and impetuous Brünnhilde. Matthias Goerne is in almost indecently good voice, helped no doubt by the recording conditions (selection of material from two concerts plus 'patching' sessions) to last out the role's length with aplomb. Petra Lang may annoy as much as she pleases. The standard euphemism about 'great character' – and an uncanny similarity to Martha Mödl's singing of the role in the 1950s – covers some sins not so much of pitch but of placing of the voice. Lang can sound both very old and very young but there's never a doubt where we are in the role's psychology.

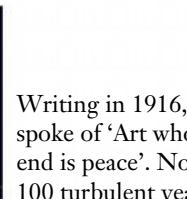
Around these big four the supporting cast are not lacking. Michelle DeYoung argues Fricka's case with power and sweep; Falk Struckmann, in a new part of the Wagner *Fach* for him, uses text rather than colour to frighten as Hunding. The Valkyrie group is well chosen – someone with an excellent ear has sampled recent European cast lists skilfully. These girls not only make for a tight ensemble but provide a real foil in their little individual moments for Wotan and Brünnhilde.

The recorded balance favours the voices at all times, pushing the consistently fine orchestra further back than it sounded in *Das Rheingold*. So this is not a theatre balance and I could occasionally have done with more sheer heft from the band, for example as Wotan (and the brass) starts to get very angry both before and after his Act 2 monologue. Overall though – and notwithstanding the amount of strong, familiar and older competition from the rest of the catalogue – this is an impressive and likeable achievement.

Mike Ashman

## 'In War & Peace'

### 'Harmony Through Music'

**Handel** Agrippina - Pensieri, voi mi tormentate. **Giulio Cesare** - Da tempeste il legno infranto; Vani sono i lamenti...Svegliatevi nel core; Cara speme<sup>a</sup> **Jeptha**, HWV70 - Some dire event hangs o'er our heads...Scenes of horror, scenes of woe. **Rinaldo** - Augelletti che cantate; Lascia ch'io pianga. **Susanna**, HWV66 - Lead me, oh lead me to some cool retreat...Crystal streams in murmurs flowing **Jommelli** Attilio Regolo - Par che di giubilo **Leo** Andromaca - Prendi quel ferro, o barbaro! **Monteverdi** Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria - Illustratevi, o cieli **Purcell** Bonduca - Oh! Lead me to some peaceful gloom. Dido and Aeneas - Thy hand, Belinda...When I am laid in earth. The Indian Queen - They tell us that you mighty powers above **Joyce DiDonato** *mez* **Il Pomo d'Oro / Maxim Emelyanychev** *hpd* Erato  9029 59284-6;  9029 59284-1 (79' • DDD • T/t). <sup>a</sup>Included as a bonus on LP only



Writing in 1916, Yeats spoke of 'Art whose end is peace'. Now, 100 turbulent years later, mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato returns to the question of how to find consolation and quiet in an increasingly disordered world. She too finds her answer in art – 'a valiant path to peace', as she writes in her introduction to an album that is as much a personal manifesto as a recital.

Returning to the repertoire where it all began, 'In War & Peace' finds DiDonato back on Baroque ground for the first time in a while, and it's a joyful musical homecoming. The risks are bigger, the dramatic stakes higher than in 'Drama Queens' (1/13) – it's as if she and the musicians of *Il Pomo d'Oro* are playing an elaborate game of chicken, each daring the other to spin a quieter, more fragile *pianissimo*, or to ornament a *da capo* with more ferocious brilliance.

Arranging her programme into two halves – 'War' and 'Peace' – DiDonato makes it clear that this is no straightforward binary. Fleeting moments of stillness and beauty are found even in war ('They tell us that you mighty powers', 'When I am laid in earth'), while peace can be extrovert and full of joy ('Da tempeste') or merely an illusion, created only to be threatened by kidnap or rape (Susanna's 'Crystal streams in murmurs flowing', exquisitely shaped, or 'Augelletti che cantate').

Roaming freely between alto and soprano roles, DiDonato once again demonstrates the flexibility of a voice capable of finding both the innocent simplicity of an Almirena and the mature emotions of Dido or

Monteverdi's Penelope – 'Illustratevi o cieli', the queen's long-delayed release into aria, radiates hard-won contentment. Best, however, are the more demonstrative arias: Cleopatra's irrepressible 'Da tempeste', Maxim Emelyanychev's band strumming their accompaniment like a giant guitar; Leo's explosive 'Prendi quel ferro', the pick of the three fine arias by Leo and Jommelli receiving their premiere recordings here.

Drama, as ever with DiDonato, is everything. Ornamentation serves narrative first, ego second, reduced to almost nothing in 'Lascia ch'io pianga' for fear of overbalancing the sincerity of this plea for freedom, but turned up high in Jommelli's 'Par che di giubilo'. An occasionally too-frenetic vibrato is the only blot on an otherwise excellent recording.

Alexandra Coghlan

## 'A Journey'

**Bellini** Beatrice di Tenda - Respira io qui...Ma la sola...Ah, la pena in lor piombo. **I Puritani** - O rendetemi la sperme...Qui la voce soave... **Vien, diletto<sup>a</sup>** **Delibes** Lakmé - Sous le dôme épais<sup>b</sup> **Donizetti** Lucia di Lammermoor - Ancor non giunsel...Regnava nel silenzio...Quando rapito in estasi<sup>b</sup> **Gounod** Roméo et Juliette - Dieu! Quel frisson court dans mes veines **Rossini** Il barbiere di Siviglia - Una voce poco fa. Le comte Ory - En proie à la tristesse **Pretty Yende** *sop* <sup>b</sup>**Kate Aldrich** *mez* <sup>a</sup>**Nicola Alaimo** *bar* <sup>a</sup>**Gianluca Buratto** *bass* **Chorus of the Municipal Theatre, Piacenza; RAI National Symphony Orchestra / Marco Armiliato** Sony Classical  88985 32169-2 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Ignore the feel-good title and the fluffy booklet-note, and what you have here is actually a serious recital from an artist at the start of what is, let's hope, a significant career. Which is not to underplay the young South African soprano's story. Growing up in the small town of Piet Retief, she got hooked on opera when she heard Delibes's Flower Duet as a teenager. Just 10 years later she was appearing on many of the world's great stages.

It's that journey that this disc charts, documenting the arias and roles – some at the slightly rarer end of the *bel canto* spectrum – that have marked her progress. The inclusion of the Flower Duet, though biographically justified, of course, feels like the only concession to populism.

It all starts off a little slowly with an 'Una voce poco fa' that takes a little while to hit its stride, but it soon becomes clear, as Yende leaves her slightly underpowered



Baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky displays his 'virile, velvety' voice in a Russian recital

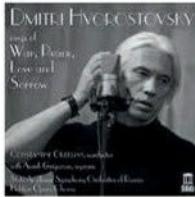
middle register to unveil a brilliant top, that hers is a lyric coloratura voice of real beauty and flexibility. There's a dash of cream to it, and she phrases with instinctive musicality and feel for line, meaning that her Bellini and Donizetti, in particular, have a real seductiveness to them. Her *Comte Ory* Countess is a high-quality affair, too.

But Yende isn't quite the finished product – and recital discs rarely show singers at their best. She doesn't manage, for example, to go beyond intelligent phrasing into the sort of acting with the voice that the best singers in this repertoire offer (most of them, admittedly, now in the past). Nor does she introduce much tonal variety to distinguish between her characters. Her French isn't consistent, and her impressively fluent coloratura loses its sureness as she ascends.

She doesn't get the best support, either: Marco Armiliato could have fired up his players a little more (and tidied up some unsure wind playing); Kate Aldrich is undistinguished in her appearances, while Gianluca Buratto and Nicola Alaimo offer rather rustic interjections in the *Puritani* mad scene. Yende herself is clearly a major talent, though, and one who is only going to get better. This particular journey's only the beginning. **Hugo Shirley**

## 'War, Peace, Love and Sorrow'

**P**rokofiev *War and Peace* – The radiance of the sky in spring **Rubinstein** *The Demon* – Scene 6 **Tchaikovsky** *Iołanta* – Robert's aria. *Mazepa* – Mazepa's aria. *The Queen of Spades* – Tomsky's Ballad; Tomsky's Song  
**Dmitri Hvorostovsky** bar **Asmik Grigorian** sop **Irina Shishkova** mez **Vadim Volkov** counterten **Igor Morozov** ten **Mikhail Guzhov** bass **Helikon Opera Chorus; State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia / Constantine Orbelian**  
Delos © DE3517 (54' • DDD)



Dmitri Hvorostovsky's career has been built on the twin pillars of Italian and Russian repertoire. His very first album paired Verdi with Tchaikovsky and, although there is no *Onegin*, arias from *Iołanta* and *Mazepa* return for this new disc of Russian scenes and arias from Delos. If top notes don't come quite as easily, it's remarkable how much richness his virile, velvety baritone retains, especially considering that this recording was set down amid treatment for a brain tumour.

From *The Queen of Spades*, the Siberian baritone moves from the suave Prince Yeletsky (I still marvel at his outrageous breath control on that first album) to the cynical Count Tomsky. His Ballad of the Three Cards ('tri karty') is a bit low-voltage, lacking the vehement bite of, say, Sergei Leiferkus (who sang the role opposite Hvorostovsky's Yeletsky for RCA). He's more at home in the suggestive song likening girls to birds nestling on a branch.

Over the years, Hvorostovsky has done much to promote Anton Rubinstein's opera *The Demon*. Arias have featured on two previous collections, and here half the (not-too-generous) disc is taken up with the final scene where, in a convent, the demon reveals his tortured soul to Tamara. When she finally succumbs, his kiss kills her. Partnered by Asmik Grigorian, daughter of the late Gegam Grigorian with whom Hvorostovsky performed many times, they make a great case for the opera. Grigorian's warm, vibrant soprano is also heard in the opening scene to Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, as Hvorostovsky's noble Prince Andrei yearns for springtime happiness. Constantine Orbelian leads fairly routine playing, but full texts and translations are included. **Mark Pullinger**



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# MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Mozart's Requiem launches two very different listening journeys

## The road to the Requiem

Mozart's Requiem is the earliest such work to have broken free from its liturgical bonds and become a regular fixture in the concert hall and on record. Even in its unfinished state, it represents the peak of Mozart's mature style, balancing perfectly the dramatic and the devotional, the antique and the modern.

Mozart had been involved with church music from childhood in Salzburg, the earliest of his Masses – the **Waisenhausmesse**, K139, a large-scale, cantata-style work – being composed when he was a boy of 12. His break with Salzburg led to a decade with only sporadic ventures into sacred music, the most breathtaking being the **Mass in C minor**, in which we hear his first foray into the styles of Handel and Bach that would inform so much of the music of his Vienna decade. By the time he came to write the Requiem, he leant on models including **The ways of Zion do mourn** – part of Handel's Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline, which is a clear forerunner of the Requiem's Introit – and Michael

Haydn's **Requiem** for Archbishop Schrattenbach, in which he and his father had played in Salzburg in 1771: Mozart unmistakably based his 'Domine Jesu Christe' on the younger Haydn's. Mozart arranged **Messiah** for performance in 1789 and manifestly learnt much from Handel's style.

Mozart's other music of mourning includes the wonderful, dark-hued **Masonic Funeral Music**, with its contrabassoon and trio of bassett-horns. In 1791 church music was once again on his mind and the richly scored **Kyrie** in D minor, K341, has become associated with this renewed interest.

After the Requiem, Mozart's posthumous collaborators also essayed the form. The **Requiem** by Franz Xaver Süssmayr – author of (most of) the 'standard completion' of the Mozart, offered a far less dramatic take on the text, while Joseph Leopold Eybler's choral music shows the palpable influence of his erstwhile mentor. And in 1792, having heard of his young friend's death, Haydn encoded his own memorial to Mozart in his **Symphony No 98**'s slow movement. **David Threasher**

**Mozart Waisenhausmesse** Neumann Warner Classics

**Mozart Mass in C minor** Gardiner Philips

**Handel The ways of Zion do mourn** Christie

Les Arts Florissants Edns

**M Haydn Requiem** Zacharias MDG

**Handel/Mozart Messiah** Mackerras Archiv

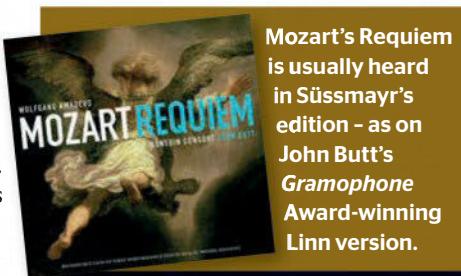
**Mozart Masonic Funeral Music** LSO / Kertész Decca

**Mozart Kyrie**, K341 Herreweghe Harmonia Mundi

**Süssmayr Requiem** Armstrong Avie

**Eybler Choral works** Froschauer Phoenix

**Haydn Symphony No 98** Minkowski Naïve



Mozart's Requiem is usually heard in Süssmayr's edition – as on John Butt's Gramophone Award-winning Linn version.



Luciano Berio: completed Puccini's Turandot

## Imperfect perfection

Unfinished works have a unique romanticism about them. Think of Gaudí's Sagrada Família in Barcelona, the Venus de Milo, Mozart's Requiem, Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* – they all beg the same question: what might have come next? What might the finished piece have sounded/ looked like? There are generally two reasons for pieces left unfinished – either the composer broke off work to do something else or he simply ran out of time (**Haydn's last quartet** is a fine example). **Schubert's Symphony No 8** is perhaps the most famous unfinished work – perfect in its incomplete state, and intriguing though it is to hear various attempts at finishing it, it never seems to beg a note more. But it's not a last work: the composer lived for another six years, prompting the question 'Why did he stop?' (Schubert's C major Piano Sonata, D840, known as the **Reliquie** – because it was thought to be his last composition – is similarly unfinished and similarly mysterious.) Bach's **The Art of**

**Fugue** got so close to completion, but stopped midway through *Contrapunctus XIV*, and there's something very touching about a performance that simply stops there. Operatically there are many completions: Weber's **Die drei Pintos** completed by Mahler, Mussorgsky's **Khovanshchina** first completed by Rimsky-Korsakov, or then in a version by Ravel and Stravinsky and also by Shostakovich (which is what Gergiev recorded) but by far the most exotic is Luciano Berio's ending for Puccini's **Turandot**, lifting the work into a completely different tonal world. Symphonically, Bruckner's three-movement **Ninth Symphony** stands powerfully (à la Schubert's *Unfinished*) on its own, though there have been various attempts to finish it. Mahler's **Tenth** is more often heard 'complete', usually in the performing edition by Deryck Cooke, than as the *Adagio* alone (and the manuscript does trace the work bar-by-bar from beginning to end). Elgar's **Third** enjoyed a brief period of attention and some superb recordings, after Anthony Payne's masterly 'elaboration'. **James Jolly**



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**Haydn String Quartet, Op 103** Angeles Qt Philips

**Schubert Symphony No 8** COE / Abbado DG

**Schubert Piano Sonata, D840** Richter Philips

**Bach The Art of Fugue** Moroney Harmonia Mundi

**Weber/Mahler** Russian Nat Orch / Pletnev DG

**Mussorgsky/Shostakovich** Kirov / Gergiev Philips

**Puccini/Berio** Giuseppe Verdi SO / Chailly Decca

**Bruckner Symphony No 9** BPO / Abbado DG

**Mahler/Cooke Symphony No 10** BPO / Rattle

Warner Classics

**Elgar/Payne Symphony No 3** LSO / C Davis LSO Live

# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## Michael Gielen's Bruckner challenge

Controversial and exciting, a set of Bruckner symphonies not to miss; plus Praga offerings both great and so-so

**H**aving relished the Vol 1 of SWR Music's Michael Gielen Edition back in June, I'm delighted to welcome Volume 2, which is devoted entirely to Bruckner's symphonies (nine out of a potential 11 completed works, that is), readings that, in the main, communicate a genuine love of the music and treat textural clarity as paramount.

Four special points of interest beg for attention. Firstly, there's the case of the Ninth Symphony, where having granted us a fine 1993 version as part of a previous edition (Intercord, 1994), Gielen ups the ante in terms of breadth and gravitas, the movement timings increasing from 22'27"/11'19"/24'45" on the earlier recording to 27'05"/12'04"/27'50" in 2013. In this later reading he is as patient and awe-inspiring as the young Jochum or, more controversially, the older (and even slower) Celibidache, though he is less individualistic than either. Go to the first movement's coda at 20'37" in the first version, then at 24'37" in the second: in the latter, note the extra clarity of the woodwinds (especially the characterful clarinet), the pounding basses, the powerful brass and timps and the recording's huge dynamic range. No contest.

The other three points all concern the chosen musical texts, and here we're not referring to the odd minor cut or spot of reorchestration. In the case of the Third Symphony (previously on Hänsler Classic), Gielen opts for the 1877 version in the 1981 edition by Leopold Nowak (with *Scherzo* coda) – as ever, John F Berk's online discography ([abrunder.com](http://abrunder.com)) is an enormous help in identifying precisely which editions are used. This is the version – a very comprehensive one, though not overlong – also chosen by Harnoncourt,

Sir Georg Solti, Bernard Haitink, Philippe Herreweghe, Osmo Vänskä and Jaap van Zweden, and not to be confused with the more expansive 1873 'original version' recorded by Georg Tintner, Eliahu Inbal, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Roger Norrington, Jonathan Nott and others.

In the case of the Eighth Symphony, Gielen's choice of the 1887 'original version' (ed Leopold Nowak, 1972) finds him in the company of Inbal, Tintner, Kent Nagano, Franz Welser-Möst and Simone Young. As with the 'original' Fourth (1874) – which is also included here – there are significant differences between this and the more familiar revisions. This first local release of a 2007 performance of the Eighth is inordinately slow (95'47" compared with Inbal's 75'35"), milking Bruckner's discursive first thoughts for all they're worth: for example, the unexpected swing into the major that concludes the first movement (from 17'20"), and various other episodes where tales of the unexpected predominate. The *Scherzo* is anything but – it's dogged, emphatic and granitic.

The Fourth Symphony (a 1994 recording previously available on Intercord and EMI) features numerous altered details, both thematic and textural, but none more striking than the *Scherzo*, which is different, new and a far cry from the idyllic hunting scene that we're familiar with. I recall seeing Gielen perform this edition of the Eighth in London some years ago, and it caused quite a stir even then.

The remainder of the cycle follows a more regular editorial path. Gielen opts for the Vienna version of Symphony No 1 and Robert Haas's edition of No 2; both are first releases, high in drama but warmly drawn whenever more lyrical ideas take the upper hand. The Fifth and Sixth Symphonies vie for the 'Bruckner's *Eroica*'

epithet – the former kept light on its feet with a closing peroration that compares to the best in modern times; the latter (previously on Hänsler) among the finest versions of the stereo era, the first movement's coda featuring a glorious (and superbly balanced) show of brass sonorities (from 15'41"), the slow movement quite Elgarian in its nobility (4'53"), the finale consistently animated. Gielen makes an intensely lyrical statement of the 1885 Nowak version of the Seventh Symphony (1986, previously on EMI and Intercord), as swiftly flowing as the Eighth is lovingly distended – in fact, it's one of the swiftest on disc. Neither cymbals nor triangle cap the slow movement, only timpani; and in the finale, tempos are exceedingly well judged.

The set involves two orchestras: the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg; and the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra, the same band that Stanislaw Skrowaczewski conducts on his set (which also includes the early F minor and D minor Symphonies plus the Overture in G minor; Oehms OC207). That set, which is editorially less controversial than Gielen's, would be my prime recommendation, alongside Günter Wand's Cologne RSO series (now on RCA Masters); but Gielen pushes the boat out so often, and so effectively, that I'd hate to deprive myself – or you – of being on board. His experience of Bruckner greets all weathers and is extraordinarily exciting. Don't miss the opportunity of hearing it, especially as the sound is for the most part excellent.

### THE RECORDING



**'Michael Gielen Edition, Vol 2'**  
Bruckner Symphonie Nos 1-9  
SWR Music © ® SWR19014CD



Experienced Brucknarian: Michael Gielen conducting the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg

## Mravinsky anomaly

At first glance, a high priority among Praga Digital's latest trawl is one of two releases devoted to Yevgeny Mravinsky: a mostly-Sibelius concert that opens with a work that until now has been absent from Mravinsky's repertoire on disc – Sibelius's Symphony No 3. Yet a reliable online Mravinsky discography ([mqcd-musique-classique.com/forum/showthread.php?t=7653](http://mqcd-musique-classique.com/forum/showthread.php?t=7653)) makes no mention of Sibelius No 3, and neither is it – nor, indeed, any concert performance of the Third – mentioned in Gregor Tassie's *Yevgeny Mravinsky: the Noble Conductor* (2005). The performance itself, said to date from October 23, 1963, displays certain 'Mravinskian' characteristics such as a broad dynamic sweep (in the first movement) and an invariable control of line. But in the finale, at the point where divided muted triplets on violins at the *più allegro* passage fall from the woodwind phrases like snowflakes (from around 0'26"), something odd happens: they are entirely missing – not the sort of thing you would expect from the perfectionist Mravinsky. Is that why until now the recording has been kept securely under wraps? Or could it be a rehearsal? I've checked rival versions of the finale, and it doesn't appear to be a textual issue. Significantly, this is the only recording of the four programmed that has no named producer.

The other two Sibelius pieces (both magnificent performances) are *The Swan of Tuonela*, from February 23, 1965, and the Seventh Symphony, listed in the online discography as being from the same concert and by Praga as being recorded on

October 29, 1965. However, there is, as far as I can tell, only one Mravinsky Sibelius No 7 – and this is it. Also included are sleek but not very well-recorded accounts of Debussy's 'Nuages' and 'Fêtes' (previously on Russian Disc and Leningrad Masters).

### THE RECORDING



**Sibelius, Debussy**  
Leningrad Philharmonic  
Orchestra / Mravinsky  
Praga  PRD/DSD350 106

## An oddity – and a rarity

Another Praga Mravinsky anomaly appears on a disc that couples a sizzling Beethoven No 4 with Shostakovich's Tenth, both said to come from the same 1955 Prague Spring festival concert (PRD/DSD350 115). Being in stereo, the Beethoven must surely be later (as far as I know, stereo recordings didn't emanate from the Eastern bloc until the late 1950s), whereas the mono Shostakovich probably is what it says it is. Both performances generate maximum intensity, the second movement of the Shostakovich virtually to the point of self-combustion.

Of rather more discographical interest, given its comparative rarity, is a pairing of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* with the Krenek edition of the first movement of Mahler's Tenth sympathetically performed by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under George Sebastian. These mid-1960s stereo recordings appear to have been released on LP by French/German HMV and Eterna, the sound close-set and spatially well defined, with vivid strings in the

Schoenberg (the Mahler is less good). The transfers are fitfully problematic in that excessive filtering eats around the music at low level, though there's less of a problem when everyone is playing flat out. Additional items feature the Columbia SO: Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* passably transferred and beautifully moulded under Bruno Walter; and the third movement of Berg's *Lyric Suite* in its full string version conducted by Robert Craft. This has evidently been taken from the CBS LP 'Music of Alban Berg', but how much better to have had, instead of the indifferently recorded Sebastian, the Berg *Chamber Concerto* (with Israel Baker, who also recorded the Schoenberg Violin Concerto under Craft), and the *Lulu* orchestral excerpts. These and the rest of CBS's Craft-directed Second Viennese School legacy – much of it fastidiously performed and extremely well recorded – would be well worth resurrecting as a tribute to Craft?

### THE RECORDING

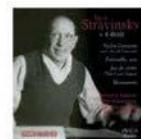


**'String Idylls'**  
Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch /  
George Sebastian, etc  
Praga  PRD/DSD250 344

## Stravinsky refurbished

As for Stravinsky, Craft's Sony efforts are widely available on CD but by far the most sonically satisfactory selection in this patchy Praga release is an all-Stravinsky programme that opens to a rhythmically chipper and urbanely phrased account of the Violin Concerto with David Oistrakh and the Concerts Lamoureux under Bernard Haitink (originally on Philips); Otto Klemperer's dry, slow-motion *Pulcinella Suite* with the Philharmonia (not exactly a pick-me-up but very well played, also on Warner/EMI); and a very vital Bavarian RSO recording of *Jeu de cartes* under Stravinsky's own direction (mono; previously on Orfeo). The serial masterpiece *Movements* completes the programme, with Margrit Weber as soloist and the Berlin RSO under Ferenc Fricsay (DG). Only the Munich broadcast sounds a mite harsh, whereas the rest are in stereo and come across very palatably. If the programme appeals (and it is a very good one), then proceed with confidence. 

### THE RECORDING



**'Igor Stravinsky: in 4 Deals'**  
Soloists, Various orch /  
Fricsay, Haitink, Klemperer,  
Stravinsky  
Praga  PRD/DSD250 329

# Books



## Richard Osborne on Murakami's conversations with Seiji Ozawa:

*'Now in his 69th year, Murakami has known Ozawa's work since the mid-1960s, the first golden age of Ozawa's career as a conductor'*



## Kate Molleson reads a lifetime of letters from John Cage:

*'Cage the idealist was not always entirely engaged with the gnarly realities of here-and-now daily politics'*

### Absolutely on Music

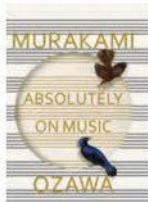
**Conversations with Seiji Ozawa**

**by Haruki Murakami**

**Translated by Jay Rubin**

Harvill Secker, HB, 352pp, £20

ISBN 978-1-84-655918-1



In Haruki Murakami's witty and fantastical coming-of-age novel *Kafka on the Shore*, the young truck-driver Hoshino asks, 'Has music the power to change people?'

'Sure that can happen,' replies Oshima, a stylish 21-year-old transgender librarian with a love of Schubert and fast cars. 'We have an experience – like a chemical reaction – that transforms something inside us. When we examine ourselves later on, we discover that all the standards we've lived by have shot up another notch and the world's opened up in unexpected ways.'

Earlier Hoshino catches a snatch of Beethoven's *Archduke* Trio in a roadside café run by a retired coffee-bean-roasting civil servant. It's the Rubinstein/Heifetz/Feuermann recording (now a YouTube hit thanks to the novel). '1941,' says the bean man, 'but the brilliance hasn't faded.' 'Good things never grow old,' replies Oshima.

Back in the real world in *Conversations*, Ozawa tells Murakami how Karajan taught him to think beyond the usual four- or eight-bar phrase, information which Murakami instantly decodes. 'Karajan's performances always have this very solid narrative that derives from these long phrases. I'm often amazed how his old recordings have this element of storytelling or persuasiveness that has survived the years.'

*Absolutely on Music* is very much Murakami's book, which is how it should be. Few novelists, not even EM Forster, have been as indebted to music as Murakami is. The cue for the conversations came in 2010 when Ozawa was recuperating from life-saving surgery. With time on his

hands, Ozawa would visit Murakami to talk about music and listen to records. In fact, Ozawa loathes record collectors. He even asks Murakami (an informed collector) to ensure that the conversations are aimed, not at record-buyers, but at people 'who really love music'.

It is something of an irony, then, that for the first 65 pages Ozawa is drawn by Murakami into an anorak-like discussion of the playing of the first movement of Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto. After Gould and Bernstein – their famously disputatious account of the Brahms D minor, an event Ozawa witnessed, has begun the conversations – there is Gould with Karajan, Serkin with Bernstein, Serkin with Ozawa, and so on. Murakami also mentions the pistols-at-dawn 1944 recording Toscanini made with Arthur Rubinstein. Despite having once been Rubinstein's lavishly retained touring conductor, Ozawa has never heard of it. Old recordings are not his thing.

Now in his 69th year, Murakami has known Ozawa's work since the mid-1960s, the first – some would say the principal – golden age of Ozawa's career as a conductor. Listen to the recording of Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* he made at the composer's request in Toronto in 1967 (RCA, 9/68) and you can hear why his old mentors Leonard Bernstein and Herbert von Karajan were so dazzled by this unique mix of pixie charm and a preternaturally sensitive musical intelligence.

Murakami is a writer by trade, Ozawa an orchestral technician. Ozawa's reports of studying with both Bernstein and Karajan are richly informative, though I was astonished by the inaccuracy of some of his memories and his occasionally fallible grasp of musical history. Age and ill-health may be factors here, though, as Ozawa concedes, he was never perhaps the most reliable of witnesses. He has always had problems with language. Born in Japanese-occupied Manchuria in 1935 (an occupation gruesomely chronicled in Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*),

he didn't fully speak Japanese until he was at kindergarten, since when he has spent many years in America and Austro-Germany, whose languages he has never entirely mastered. If, however, Ozawa's side of the conversations can seem undernourished, Murakami's contributions (on Mahler, for example) bring ample compensation.

It was Karajan who told Ozawa, 'the symphonic repertory and opera are like two wheels on a single axle. If either of the wheels is missing, you can't go anywhere.' We learn a good deal here about Ozawa's opera career. As for his 28 years with the Boston Symphony, Ozawa's judgement is that he polished the orchestra into a world-class ensemble. Others might suggest the reverse.

In the book's final section Murakami visits the Seiji Ozawa International Academy in Switzerland, a string-based school inspired by the Toho Gakuen School in Tokyo where Ozawa studied under his beloved master Hideo Saito. It's here, too, that Ozawa and Murakami ponder some of the great issues that unite and divide Asian and Western attitudes to music-making and listening. Given the vast commercial importance to the West of Asia's interest in classical music, it's a conversation that is well worth hearing.

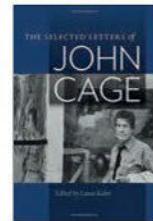
Richard Osborne

### The Selected Letters of John Cage

**Edited by Laura Kuhn**

Wesleyan University Press, HB, 674pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-8195-7591-3



These collected letters – more than 500 of them, long and short, serious and daft – are an engrossing read and a valuable resource. We get detailed correspondences variously to and about Pierre Boulez, Henry Cowell, macrobiotics, the I Ching and Buddhism, David Tudor,



John Cage with his partner – and recipient of many letters of ‘wit and sweetness’ – Merce Cunningham

Marcel Duchamp, Marshall McLuhan, mushrooms, all that ever intrigued and inspired John Cage. We get Satie, lots on Satie, all through Cage’s life, and we witness the wit and sweetness between Cage and his partner Merce Cunningham. (For me there’s an element of intrusion that comes with eavesdropping uninvited on the intimate whisperings of other people – these love letters weren’t written for our eyes – but we do glean a lot about the artistic worlds that Cage and Cunningham moved in.)

The editor is Laura Kuhn, who knew Cage well at the end of his life and who instigated, and still directs, the John Cage Trust. Each decade of letters is introduced with un-precious biographical narrative: how in the mid-1930s ‘Cage was broke more often than not’; how in the late 1950s he won an Italian TV game show with mushrooms as his special subject, then bolstered his teaching at the New School with a course in mushroom identification; how in the early 1980s his neighbours John Lennon and Yoko Ono recommended he take up a macrobiotic diet.

There are letters to friends and family and performers and to famous people – Bernstein, Copland, Yoko Ono. Cage

writes to the artist Cy Twombly in concrete poetry, though we don’t get any of his own drawings. The first letter dates from the summer of 1930, addressed to his family (‘Dear Denver Cages and the other Outlying Cages’) from Biskra, Algeria, and overflows with the adventuresome, inquisitive, careful and generous qualities that would come to define his music. The last letter dates from July 28, 1992, and is addressed to the French pianist Martine Joste. It is remarkably businesslike, detailing how to best perform pieces including *Two*<sup>4</sup>. He died a fortnight later.

There are a few Cage biographies already out there (by Rob Haskins, David Revill, Kenneth Silverman) and there is *Chance and Circumstance* (Northwestern University Press: 2009) – an illuminating account of Cage and Cunningham by the dancer Carolyn Brown. These will probably offer a more complete picture of Cage’s context and legacy and foibles; maybe we’re still waiting for the requisite distance to appreciate his supreme imagination while dispassionately assessing his various cultural positions and impacts.

For example, there’s lack of consensus around issues of politics and current

affairs. Cage the idealist was not always entirely – often not at all – engaged with the gnarly realities of here-and-now daily politics. Kuhn attributes the lack of political discourse in the letters to the fact Cage saved it all up for his diaries, which were finally published in their entirety in 2015. Maybe so; in any case, Cage was hardly apolitical. He called himself an anarchist but was possibly best described as a libertarian (without any of the racist or right-wing associations that term might hold in America today). His approaches to voting and political parties wobbled; and, although in global politics he wanted America to be a country like any other, he had a prickly relationship with – you could say a chip on his shoulder about – Europe’s cultural elite.

His music isn’t apolitical either. Many of his works operate according to visions of social utopia. ‘A performance of music can be a metaphor for society,’ Cage wrote in the introduction to his piece *101*, where he also quotes Henry David Thoreau: ‘The best form of government is no government at all and that is the room we’ll have when we are ready for it.’ The piece, Cage goes on to say, ‘rightly or wrongly assumes we are ready for it’. **Kate Molleson**

# Classics RECONSIDERED

Scarlatti  
Piano Sonatas  
Mikhail Pletnev



**Harriet Smith** and  
**Bryce Morrison** find more  
to admire than to love in  
Mikhail Pletnev's set of  
Scarlatti piano sonatas



## Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas

Mikhail Pletnev pf

Erato 52 561 9612

A two-CD album seems hardly sufficient to contain the feast of thrilling and imaginative playing Pletnev offers here. But let's put the music first; 140 minutes of Scarlatti is hardly enough to display the full range of this inexhaustibly surprising composer. I like very much the way Pletnev makes us participate as we listen to him. He is marvellous at suggesting imaginary orchestrations and stimulating our own imagination. He makes us aware

of the different vantage points as the music passes before us, of the different tones of voice and rhetorical inflections – as various in these sonatas as the events in them are unpredictable.

This is strongly individual playing, be warned. Pletnev's free-ranging poetic licence may not be to your taste, and admittedly it does beg a few questions. Not that his spectacular virtuosity is likely to be controversial: this really is *hors de categorie* and enormously enjoyable. And the evocations of the harpsichord are often very witty – only a fool would play Scarlatti on the piano as if the harpsichord had

never existed. But Pletnev doesn't shrink from using the full resources of the piano, sustaining pedal included, and if you baulk at the prospect of that as the means to an end he will probably not be for you.

The sessions took place at the Abbey Road Studios in London in October 1994, and a little bird tells me that in only two days Pletnev recorded half as many sonatas again from which this selection was made. Terrific stuff. A rougher achievement than Horowitz's, by a fraction, but I would say it's more far-reaching, musically, and therefore more interesting.

**Stephen Plaistow** (3/96)

**Bryce Morrison** Did Scarlatti ever write a dull sonata? True, everyone has their favourites, yet of the 550 it is virtually impossible to point to one that is not the musical equivalent of a flawless multifaceted jewel. And Pletnev understands that in this snapshot of just 31 of them. Time and again he reminds you that the argument concerning the harpsichord versus the piano is made irrelevant when, from such a prodigiously gifted pianist, all of the harpsichord's glitter is complemented by a range of expression arguably beyond the earlier instrument's resources. Like Horowitz before him, Pletnev proves his point. And, more generally, he gives new meaning to the term technique and peppers everything with novel and arresting insights.

**Harriet Smith** Certainly, he takes ownership of them in no uncertain terms. I'm reminded of the point that Yevgeny Sudbin made in the booklet of his brilliant second disc of the sonatas (4/16), where he talks about all performances on the piano being effectively transcriptions because they're so far removed from the original instrument.

It's also tantalising to ponder the point that Stephen Plaistow made in his review, where he mentions that Pletnev apparently recorded another 15 or so sonatas that didn't make it on to the set. But though you can't fault his superhuman technique, I do find that there are times where he lacks humanity – take Kk96, for example. Its accents are very forceful, and it has a rather hectoring tone. Of course the repeated notes are given with an almost insolent ease, but it's brutalist, even at softer dynamics.

**BM** Perhaps another example of that lack of humanity is the D minor Sonata, Kk141. And I would agree that in comparison with others there is something hectoring and insistent about Pletnev's virtuosity. Argerich's no less phenomenal command in her live Concertgebouw performance is more humane. And then there is Gilels, Pletnev's compatriot, in a warmly Romantic and arguably old-fashioned alternative. *Quelle difference!*

**HS** I've read that Russian pianists have traditionally been schooled on a diet of

Scarlatti, rather than the Bach '48' beloved of Western pedagogues. Certainly it feels as if these artists, in their totally different ways, have this music coursing through their veins. I quite agree with you – Gilels gives the piece a real sense of grandeur; and at 4'24" he's more than a minute slower than Pletnev – that's a pretty significant timing in a piece of this length. Alongside him, Pletnev comes across as a rather irritating child, insistently tugging at your shirt sleeve for attention. Argerich manages to combine speed and lightness. But what's also interesting is the way that Sudbin is more outlandish than Pletnev, yet manages to be a good deal more playful too.

**BM** But I do love Pletnev's incisiveness in the G major Sonata, Kk283 – a march of the toy soldiers, where he relaxes his froideur and is all smiles and charm. Do you agree?

**HS** I like your notion of toy soldiers, Bryce! But gosh this is a well-drilled platoon – one step out of line and I sense it would be a march to the scaffold. I'm afraid I find this performance frankly unnerving. I know that



PHOTOGRAPHY: BRILL/ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

by Pletnev's standards it is relatively smiling, but I don't find myself believing in it. I don't think charm is in his vocabulary.

**BM** Again I was entirely taken with his uninhibited virtuosity in the A major Sonata, Kk24, and, per contra, no less impressed with his inwardness in the C sharp minor Sonata, Kk247, with its sudden excursions into remote harmonic regions. How do you feel about this?

**HS** Now here I'd agree: his A major is absolutely phenomenal, and the way he uses the pedal to warm the textures is utterly beguiling – at last we get a glimpse of Pletnev's softer side. There's always a sense, particularly here but throughout this set, that he has technique to spare – we never get anywhere near the boundaries of what is possible in his hands. And following it with the extraordinary Kk247 is a masterstroke of programming. It's interesting: my memory of this set was mainly of Pletnev's virtuosity, that he was less compelling in the more inward sonatas. But it's not that black and white, is it?

The dreamy, quasi-improvisatory quality of Kk247 is very effective, I'd agree.

**BM** Where I *would* question Pletnev's extreme view would be in the A major Sonata, Kk404. Though it's stunning at one level, the playing lacks, as you say, humanity. It is, of course, one way of playing it – and certainly a decisive one – but I feel that, for all his audacity, Scarlatti wrote with a human face and there is something pugilistic or, to borrow your term, brutalistic about Pletnev's approach.

**HS** I think 'decisive' is something of an understatement. I really don't understand what Pletnev is doing with this piece at all. It is admittedly quite a strange animal (and perhaps it's no coincidence that it doesn't feature very often in single-disc recitals), but to me his reading doesn't hang together at all convincingly – it just comes across as a sequence of affects.

**BM** Having said that, though, who could resist the sky-rocketing bravura of Kk386 in F minor, his relish of the mischievous

banana slides in Kk3 in A minor or, at the end of the second disc, Kk29 in D major, which provides the ultimate conclusion to a set full of extraordinary performances.

**HS** I can't take issue with the bravura of Kk386 – it's gobsmacking, awesome, but again it has an inhuman efficiency. I can't warm to it. And 'mischievous' isn't a word I feel that Pletnev understands; I wanted more contrast in Kk3 between the 'banana slides' (nice description!), those upward-curling diminished arpeggios and the falling chromatic lines. While in Kk29, just compare him with Marcelle Meyer. She finds a vertiginous quality without needing to resort to aggression. And her articulation is to die for – French pianism at its very finest.

**BM** Overall, then, would you agree that these are challenging, occasionally chilling, and provocative performances? They are certainly individual to the point of idiosyncrasy. I wouldn't want to be without them, though I'd want them complemented by music-making with a more human face (I am thinking here of András Schiff and Murray Perahia, and also Sudbin's recent recordings which you've already alluded to).

**HS** They're certainly provocative – and there's no question that Pletnev is a musician of brilliance, albeit a rather cold sort of brilliance. But I wonder how well this set will last: to my mind his audacity (and technical élan) has now been superseded by Sudbin, who adds warmth and wit to the mix. It's not for the purists, that's for certain, but the sense you get with Sudbin of him taking the music and flying with it is compelling. You could argue that this particular tradition of playing fast and loose with the originals began with Horowitz, but the fact that there's such a range of pianistic responses to this extraordinary music has given us the most vibrant discography when it comes to Scarlatti sonatas.

**BM** And the fact that all these pianists bring their own special insights to Scarlatti demonstrates the composer's seemingly endless range and confirm that, as Goethe said, it is when working within limits that genius declares itself.

**HS** Who could possibly argue with Goethe? I love the fact that Scarlatti continues to inspire pianists of all kinds. That's surely the ultimate accolade for any composer. But to my mind, Pletnev's recording is ultimately too one-sided in its view of Scarlatti to warrant 'classic' status. **G**

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## *The music of betrayal*

Betrayal in music probably brings to mind opera and its vengeful lovers, or works based on biblical stories. **David Gutman** finds it also in more unusual, perhaps unexpected, places – and suggests some recordings

**T**he music of betrayal is rarely conceived in a vacuum. Related instrumental abstractions have been attempted but duplicity in all its manifestations is most readily evoked through an alliance of words and music, rebooting shared mythologies or literary originals. Dramatico-musical examples, successful and otherwise, abound: from

Lorin Maazel's 21st-century operatic gloss on George Orwell's *1984* to as far back as Monteverdi and Busenello's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. That morally ambivalent take on the current affairs of first-century Rome came to the Venetian stage during the 1642-43 carnival season. Small wonder that the sequence of betrayals associated with this summer's

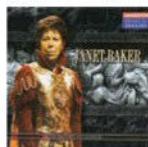
political developments in the UK already feels positively operatic.

Passing over Bob Dylan's put-down of an unnamed back-stabber in his 1965 single 'Positively 4th Street', it would be easy to choose a top 10 from the heady world of Italian melodrama, or to confine our selection to scores in which perfidy has specifically Shakespearean or biblical roots. Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1876) is one instance of 'misogynist' opera fuelled by a woman's dissembling protestations of love. In Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko* (1939) all the betrayers are men, those who would go against the will of the people as expressed through the local Communist Party committee.

Forget rarefied manifestations of stylistic faithlessness, as exhibited after the Second World War when 'serious' composers deserted tonality en masse, only for a larger group in our own time to renege on the whole idea of Modernism. Incarcerated in Theresienstadt concentration camp before his murder in Auschwitz, Viktor Ullmann sketched a disturbing symphony, to some ears less a defiant affirmation of pluralistic European culture than the indictment of a German art form, impotent in the face of the Holocaust. We might think first of the music of betrayal as encoding the desire for revenge on a two-timing lover, but there are other betrayals. **G**



The Betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot, as depicted by Giotto in 1305: just one of many betrayals to have inspired composers



### Handel Giulio Cesare

English National Opera / Charles Mackerras Chandos (9/85)

The plot's improbable pot-pourri of treachery precedes the betrayal with which we're all familiar, but that hasn't stopped Handel's opera from re-emerging as staple repertoire. A key factor was John Copley's English language production first seen at ENO in 1979. Text is cut, instruments are modern and the DVD version (Arthaus, A/02) looks tired. Still, with a starry cast led, unforgettably, by Dame Janet Baker, emotional intensity closes the credibility gap.



### Cherubini Medea

La Scala, Milan / Leonard Bernstein EMI Classics (7/78; 11/02)

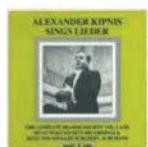
Operatic librettos don't come any nastier than this bloodthirsty tale of serial betrayal and child murder, after Euripides. Maria Callas had already made the role of avenging tigress her own when in 1953 Victor de Sabata fell ill and the seemingly unqualified Leonard Bernstein was summoned to make his La Scala debut. An oft-pirated radio broadcast survives with audible prompter and significant tape distortion. The drama itself is predictably electric.



### Verdi Otello

London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Colin Davis LSO Live (11/10)

Sir Colin Davis was at his most energised for Shakespeare's archetypal tragedy of betrayal, as compacted by Verdi and Boito. In this live concert performance, the casting is not especially idiomatic but Simon O'Neill's steely Otello and Anne Schwanewilms's swoony Desdemona throw Gerald Finley's Iago into greater relief. This is a chillingly believable villain whose motivation – racism, love, jealousy? – is left open for the listener to make sense of.



### Brahms

#### Verrat, Op 105 No 5

Alexander Kipnis bass  
Gerald Moore pf  
Music & Arts mono (2/37)

For the last of his Op 105 set, Brahms turned to a ballad by Carl von Lemcke in which a man, having discovered his sweetheart's duplicity, kills her other lover. The song (whose title translates as 'Betrayal') has folkish elements, and though it was subsequently taped by Hans Hotter and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, it was long associated with Kipnis. His 1930s recording with Moore is unique, a melodramatic scena from a bygone age with a slight Yiddish tinge to the German.



### Puccini

#### Madama Butterfly

Vienna St Op Chor;  
VPO / Herbert von Karajan Decca (2/75; 7/14)

Puccini wasn't always extravagantly cruel to his female characters. *La fanciulla del West*'s Minnie is as commanding as any Janáček heroine. Still, no list of betrayal music could overlook Cio-Cio-San, the ultimate victim. Pinkerton – the imperialist exploiter whose remorse comes far, far too late – is an ungrateful role for a mature superstar. Luciano Pavarotti was the lieutenant back in 1974, singing opposite Mirella Freni for a measured Herbert von Karajan.



### Falla

#### Siete canciones populares españolas

Victoria de los Angeles sop  
Gerald Moore pf Nimbus (2/52)

Falla dishes up love and misadventure of a more traditional kind, drawing on the various folk traditions of regional Spain. The final song is 'Polo', which expresses a wild desire for revenge on an unfaithful lover. Victoria de los Angeles, the cycle's most famous exponent, is arguably too genteel, prioritising tonal beauty over anger and fire; her 1951 mono recording with Gerald Moore is fully engaged and technically better sung than her later ones.

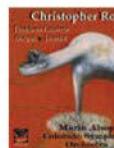


### Britten

#### Billy Budd

London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Richard Hickox Chandos (6/00)

Who is betraying who? And why? The maelstrom of closeted emotions on *HMS Indomitable* is superbly caught in Richard Hickox's star-studded recording, Simon Keenlyside in the lead. Modern productions make Claggart sexually driven, but on disc you can take Sir John Tomlinson's jet-black portrayal any way you like. As Captain Vere, Philip Langridge creates one of his ambiguous intellectuals, a Pontius Pilate removing himself from the fray yet finding a kind of absolution.



### Rouse

#### Iscariot

Colorado SO / Marin Alsop Phoenix (8/97)

There can't be many purely orchestral scores that acknowledge an act of betrayal as a motivating force. While (in the composer's words) 'intense but dolorous' *Iscariot* (1989) takes its title from the New Testament, the piece has undivulged autobiographical resonances, with American composer Christopher Rouse (b1949) referring to it as a purging of emotional memories. Alsop brings special pioneering fervour to a trio of his compositions.



### Ullmann, arr Wulff

#### Symphony No 2

Cologne Gürzenich Philharmonic Orchestra / James Conlon Capriccio

Imbued with Austro-German culture, born in a town now shared by Poland and the Czech Republic, Ullmann drafted this work shortly before dying at Auschwitz in 1944. The symphony was extrapolated by Bernhard Wulff from the copiously annotated manuscript of Ullmann's Piano Sonata No 7. The finale, a defiantly Zionist variations with fugue, has been seen as the composer's ultimate reckoning with the tropes of the civilisation that betrayed him. Conlon is a firm advocate.



### Elgar

**The Apostles** Soloists; Hallé Choir, Youth Choir and Orchestra / Mark Elder Hallé (11/12)

Was Elgar's faith hanging by a thread as he began realising his project to reconstruct the Jesus story from 'below stairs'? The centrality of Mary Magdalene and Judas Iscariot is just one surprising feature. In this thoughtful sonic tapestry, betrayal comes not so much from evil intent as from worldly pragmatism, as Judas

attempts to manoeuvre Jesus into establishing an earthly kingdom. With so much essential drama happening off stage and rapture carefully rationed, *The Apostles* is not easy to put across, but Sir Mark Elder does it proud, enhancing the traditional forces with a nine-strong semi-chorus of Apostles and a proper shofar.

# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## *Vaughan Williams's Dona nobis pacem*

Commissioned by the Huddersfield Choral Society to mark its centenary in 1936, this cantata was a passionate cry for peace in troubled times. To coincide with Remembrance Day, **Geraint Lewis** explores the work's eclectic recorded history

Using biblical imagery to telling effect in the House of Commons on February 23, 1855, the Member of Parliament for Manchester spoke against war in the Crimea: 'The angel of death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one, as [when the first-born were slain] of old, to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two sideposts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on.' Around 80 years later, John Bright's memorable words came to life again in a work composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams to mark the centenary of the Huddersfield Choral Society in 1936, when the possibility of yet another war loomed threateningly over Europe. Today, 80 years on again, both impact and message of *Dona nobis pacem* resound even more powerfully, but it is a shamefully and inexplicably neglected masterpiece. It has made only one Proms appearance (1964), but was performed by the BBC at London's Barbican earlier this year and heard in July at Gloucester Cathedral as part of the Three Choirs Festival. What a great thing it would be if all British and American choral societies performed this wonderful and moving work before the end of the Great War commemorations in the 2018-19 season.

### SURROUNDED BY CONFLICT

Born in 1872, Vaughan Williams assimilated the shadows of the Crimean War within a liberal-minded household at Leith Hill Place in Surrey, dominated by the ethos of the Wedgwoods and the Darwins from his widowed mother's side of the family. Then came the equally distant but no less emotive Boer Wars and the mingled moods of jingoism, nostalgia and waste as conjured in AE Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* – poetry inspired by thoughts of gallant English lads fighting abroad, some of which Vaughan Williams set as *On Wenlock Edge* (1909). Two years later he made a choral setting of American poet Walt Whitman's *Dirge for Two Veterans* (1865), a poem reflecting vividly the horrors and terrible losses involved in the American Civil War. But he put it away, unperformed, only to bring it out again in 1936 as the moving central panel of *Dona nobis pacem*.

When it came to the sudden and unexpected outbreak of the Great War itself in 1914, Vaughan Williams was nearly 42, yet he never shirked a personal determination to join younger comrades, even against passionate opposition from his teacher and mentor Hubert Parry. What he experienced in France was to



Vaughan Williams in Royal Army Medical Corps uniform in 1916



PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

colour and haunt the rest of his life and play a significant role in fashioning some of his most important later works.

#### CAN'T A PERSON JUST WRITE MUSIC?

Returning to civilian life and an interrupted career, Vaughan Williams began by finishing the piece he'd nearly completed before joining up – the romance for violin entitled *The Lark Ascending*. It failed to make much initial impact when premiered in 1921. Without even a shadow of war's anguish over its idyllic pages, it was oddly out of kilter with the jazz-enlivened spirit of the new age, which didn't appreciate any perceived nostalgia for a lost English Eden. And when the composer did distil in music his haunted response to the war, few at the time quite realised that he'd actually done so – so understated and subtle was the saturated sadness of the *Pastoral Symphony* (premiered 1922). The sea change suffered by Vaughan Williams's harmonic language after 1916 (when work on the symphony began) certainly registered with some, but most memorably and stupidly it provoked from Peter Warlock the notorious 'cow looking over a gate' swipe echoed by countless others. Another fellow composer, Herbert Howells, understood, however: 'You may not like the symphony's frame of mind; but there it is, strong and courageous. It is the truth of the work, and out of it would naturally arise whatever risk it has run of being publicly cold-shouldered.'

We now hear the work properly as Vaughan Williams's own 'war requiem'.

Because he wouldn't put into words at the time exactly what lay behind the music's 'frame of mind' (probably because he regretted being too literal with *A London Symphony* in 1914), Vaughan Williams was berated for not being explicit enough – as if the music itself wasn't sufficient. The same 'problem' would arise again for the cloth-eared with the premieres of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies in 1935, 1943 and 1948 respectively, all of them seen as 'war-related': was the first an angry premonition of another world war about to break, the next a prayer for peace in the midst of the war itself and the other a chilling reaction to its aftermath? In exasperation the composer would retort, 'Can't a man just write a piece of music?' – and even claimed that the Fourth was inspired merely by anger at a new roundabout under construction in Dorking. But the British aren't very good at detecting when a serious artist's tongue is in his cheek any more than they are at listening to music for its own sake. It is ironic, therefore, to find that Vaughan Williams's



Left to right: Boult conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1972; Robert Spano, whose recording takes the palm among a handful from 'across the pond'

most clear and forthright statement about war in general, *Dona nobis pacem* ('Grant Us Peace'), didn't provoke much public commentary at the time at all. Given the state of Europe then, it certainly should have been heard for what it undoubtedly was: a direct and impassioned warning.

#### LATIN PRAYER MEETS WHITMAN

The construction of this 35-minute score is both audacious and ingenious. Six sections of varying lengths play out as a continuous symphonic structure in which part of the Latin prayer *Agnus Dei* from the Ordinary of the Mass punctuates three poems by Whitman (*Beat! Beat! Drums!*, *Reconciliation* and *Dirge for Two Veterans*), Bright's words of 1855 and a biblical montage culminating

in part of the *Gloria*. We thus move from a despairing cry for peace in Latin to the declaration of 'and on earth peace' from the Gospel of Luke, but Vaughan Williams's imaginative dovetailing of the texts avoids any sense of false assurance and the work ends quietly with solo soprano and her plea left unanswered.

The most immediately moving and graphic part of *Dona nobis pacem* is the triptych of Whitman poems. Its onomatopoeic trumpets and drums which 'scatter the congregation' give way in time to the calm yet heart-rending vision that 'war and all its deeds of carnage' will be 'utterly lost' by the incessant washing of 'this soiled world' by Death and Night. The stage is thus set for the overwhelming

nocturnal procession that is 'Dirge for Two Veterans' – a slow funeral march by moonlight which is at once triumphant, tragic and cathartic: it emerges as a distant rumble, comes gradually into devastating focus and then recedes gently into the distance again. That this music was written as early as 1911 – even before Vaughan Williams had his own direct experience of warfare – is eerily prescient. Now, with hindsight at his elbow, he found the ideal large-scale context for an unforgettable musical span and managed to make a virtue of its simpler musical language of tune, rhythm and harmony.

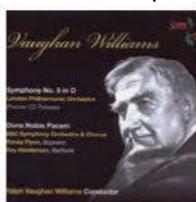
Why had he initially shelved it, then? He knew that his one-time Cambridge teacher Charles Wood had composed

#### HISTORIC CHOICE

##### BBC Symphony Chor and Orch / Ralph Vaughan Williams

Somm (F) SOMMCD071  
Capturing BBC forces and the original soloists under the composer's direction six weeks

after the Huddersfield premiere in 1936 was a major act of broadcasting strategy, and Somm's transfer allows us to eavesdrop on history in the making.



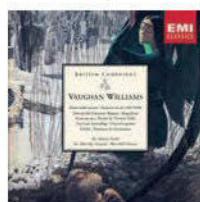
#### AUTHENTIC CHOICE

##### London Philh Ch and Orch / Sir Adrian Boult

EMI/Warner (M) ▷ 574782-2

Boult would have arranged the 1936 BBC broadcast, and his 1973 recording is even

more powerful in its ability to convey the bold structure as if in one breath and with an unrivalled hold over his galvanised choral and orchestral forces.



#### AMERICAN CHOICE

##### Atlanta Sym Chor and Orch / Robert Spano

ASO Media (F) ▷ ASO1005

With the moving Whitman settings adding a touch of natural local colour, this sturdy

performance by well-drilled Atlanta forces builds upon the famous choral legacy of Robert Shaw to capture nuance and integrity, outshining all other US accounts.



a setting (1901), but so, more significantly, did his closest musical friend, Gustav Holst (in 1914). My theory is that he didn't want to steal Holst's thunder at the time, but that with Holst's untimely death in 1934, here was the perfect tribute that the bereft Vaughan Williams could privately pay to his soulmate without having to make it publicly explicit. Although the veterans of the poem are father and son, Vaughan Williams and Holst were always comrades-in-arms, and so the gap at the former's side would now remain forever unfilled.

### NEGLECT - AND A LAUDABLE ACTION

Other performances did follow the Huddersfield premiere on October 2, 1936, when the choral society and Hallé Orchestra were conducted by Albert Coates: it got to the Three Choirs Festival (under Vaughan Williams's own baton) at Gloucester in September 1937 (as at Worcester in 1938) and also to the Leeds Festival later that autumn and thence a London premiere conducted by Malcolm Sargent on

February 5, 1938. But with warning unheeded (as if!) and war finally breaking out on September 3, 1939, another Three Choirs Festival outing in Hereford that very week was perforce cancelled: the peace for which the work so fervently called was cruelly denied the world. In the aftermath of the war the work's message – as with *The Lark Ascending* a generation earlier – inevitably seemed out of place, and so the piece fell into partial neglect, although Vaughan Williams himself liked to conduct it within his regular, if limited, circuit. There wasn't a commercial British release until 1973, and the first recording of all was actually made in Utah in America in 1966. This British neglect had nothing to do with Whitman's words, given that *A Sea Symphony* remained firmly in the repertoire during the composer's lifetime.

The BBC, however, should be commended for its immediate attention to the work by instigating a studio recording as the first broadcast performance in London on November 13, 1936, with **Ralph Vaughan Williams** conducting BBC forces plus the soloists who'd given the premiere just over a month earlier: soprano Renée Flynn and baritone Roy Henderson.



The composer with wife Adeline at their south-west London house in 1917

Issued officially on CD for the first time by Somm in 2007, this invaluable document now has unique historical authority in giving us a view of what the premiere might have been like but with the extra imprimatur of the composer himself in charge.

Although Vaughan Williams was typically self-deprecating about his abilities as a conductor, the few surviving recordings with him on the podium all show him more than capable of capturing the essence of his music. The searing account of Symphony No 4 in October 1937 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra (who, with Boult, had premiered the work in 1935) is

the most celebrated example, but this *Dona nobis pacem* runs it close – and may well have inspired Boult (who was BBC music director at the time) to instigate that very recording of the new symphony. The sound quality of this studio performance is pretty remarkable for its time and vividly captures a difficult balancing act: the initial quiet keening by the solo soprano and a hushed chorus suddenly drowned by a full orchestral onslaught and chorus in full cry. These huge differences are superbly maintained throughout.

It has to be said at this point that the BBC's 1936 performance provides a near-ideal template for others; however, until 2007 (officially) the only conductor who could have benefited from its example was **Sir Adrian Boult**, whose recording with London Philharmonic forces was made for EMI at Kingsway Hall, London, in 1973. As he showed in 1937 by giving Vaughan Williams his BBC band to record the Fourth Symphony,

Boult was the least selfish of conductors; in 1943, again, he arranged an unofficial run-through of the Fifth Symphony with the BBC SO in Bedford (on evacuation) so that the parts could be checked, even though the premiere would be given at the Proms by the LPO with the composer himself conducting.

Boult's 1973 *Dona nobis pacem* is therefore quite audibly an attempt to get as close to Vaughan Williams's spirit as possible, and he succeeds uncannily now that Somm's masterly transfer by Gary Moore can be checked for comparison. The London Philharmonic

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### DATE / ARTISTS

1936	Flynn, Henderson; BBC Sym Chor & Orch / <b>Vaughan Williams</b>
1966	Christensen, Metcalf; U of Utah Civic Chorale; Utah SO / <b>Abraavanel</b>
1973	Armstrong, Case; London Philh Ch & Orch / <b>Boult</b>
1988	Wiens, Rayner Cook; London Philh Ch & Orch / <b>Thomson</b>
1992	Kenny, Terfel; London Sym Chor & Orch / <b>Hickox</b>
1993	Howarth, Allen; Corydon Sgrs & Orch / <b>Best</b>
1997	Pelton, Gunn; Atlanta Sym Chor & Orch / <b>Shaw</b>
2009	Pier, Brook; Bach Ch; Bournemouth SO / <b>Hill</b>
2014	Fox, Maltman; Colorado Sym Chor & Orch / <b>Litton</b>
2014	Rivera, Polegato; Atlanta Sym Chor & Orch / <b>Spano</b>

### RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

Somm	© SOMMCD071 (4/08)
Vanguard	© SVC7 (10/67; 9/72 <sup>1</sup> )
EMI/Warner	© 574782-2; ④ 903567-2 (5/74 <sup>1</sup> )
Chandos	© CHAN8590 (3/89)
EMI/Warner	© 754788-2 (12/93 <sup>1</sup> )
Hyperion	© CDA66655 (5/94); ④ CDS44321/4
Telarc	© CD80479 (11/98)
Naxos	© 8 572424 (5/10)
Hyperion	© CDA68096 (6/15)
ASO Media	© ASO1005 (4/15)

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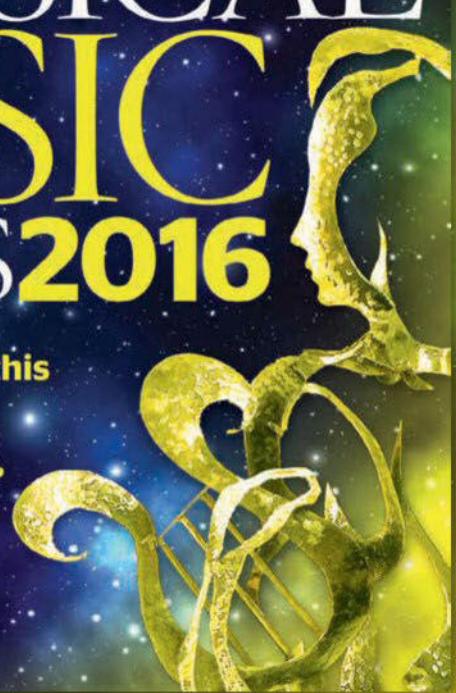
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Choir as trained by John Alldis is on biting form, and diction throughout is exemplary. This is in effect a choral symphony, which is where Boult remains unrivalled as a master of architectural span: from the visceral start to its echo at the end, he finds the unerring tempo and control for each section so that there emerges an inevitability to both musical and textual arguments. We are fortunate that EMI assigned this score to Boult and London Philharmonic forces and not (as they did around the same time with *Sancta civitas*, *Five Tudor Portraits* and *Hodie*) to the then-soggier Bach Choir under Sir David Willcocks, whose shorter-term direction in general fails to meld chorus and orchestra into a proper dramatic unity. Boult's implacable and visionary long-term grasp is invaluable here and makes this a truly authentic document. The singing of Sheila Armstrong is peerless and the oft-maligned John Carol Case provides nobility and impeccable diction. It emerges that the

latter's tone and rolled Rs are possibly modelled on those of Henderson, and for some will have too much of a vintage character. So it is perhaps a shame that the more timeless and less dated John Shirley-Quirk (who took the part in that only Prom outing in 1964, with Heather Harper and Sargent) wasn't selected for this recording – it would then have given the later top choices a genuine run for their money.

#### FROM ACROSS THE POND

The first commercial recording, in 1966, was made for Vanguard in Utah by **Maurice Abravanel** conducting the University of Utah Civic Chorale and Symphony Orchestra, and it isn't at all bad. It would have provided a necessary stopgap until Boult's was issued in 1974 but now sounds rather faded.

Perhaps because of the American poetry it sets, *Dona nobis pacem* has enjoyed another three US recordings, two of them made in Atlanta, Georgia. **Robert Shaw's** famous Atlanta Symphony Chorus was captured under his direction in 1997 by Telarc, but the account sounds boxed-in,



Richard Hickox, who had the luxury of baritone Bryn Terfel for his 1992 recording

even though it does showcase the fine baritone of Nathan Gunn. In 2014 with **Robert Spano** at the helm (for their own ASO label), the same chorus and orchestra sound better and have a magnificently sonorous soloist in Brett Polegato. This powerfully straightforward account easily takes the American palm and contrasts painfully with another, also taped in 2014, by the Colorado Symphony and Colorado Symphony Chorus under Andrew Litton

#### ULTIMATE CHOICE

**London Sym Chor and Orch / Richard Hickox**

EMI/Warner ⑧ 754788-2

Hickox brings his LSO forces together impressively in superb Abbey Road sound to convey all the sweep and power of this score. Of modern recordings, he pips Matthew Best to the post in large part owing to the

magisterial presence of Bryn Terfel, whose commanding tone makes this a definitive reading and inspires all present to give their very best. Simply magnificent!

for Hyperion. This, unlike the other US recordings, imports British soloists in Sarah Fox and Christopher Maltman, but both sound under par and sing with too much obtrusive vibrato. The chorus is woeful, the orchestra perfunctory and the direction prosaic: this is one of those discs whose best feature is quite honestly its cover.

#### MODERN BRITS

Luckily there are four remaining British recordings which more than make amends: all are similar in character and their differences come largely down to the soloists they field. In 1988, **Bryden Thomson** had the LPO in St Jude's Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb (north London), with the help of sumptuous Chandos engineering; but Edith Wiens and Brian Rayner Cook are pallid singers here, and the performance sounds more like a final afternoon rehearsal in an empty church than the real thing. At Abbey Road for EMI in 1992, **Richard Hickox**

with LSO forces (the chorus trained magnificently by Stephen Westrop) had the luxury of Bryn Terfel as baritone, and this is what sets this version apart. From his first utterance to the last, Terfel brings warmth, humanity, superb but unobtrusive diction and a truly imperious ring when required; and in Bright's chilling speech he raises the hairs like no other singer. All others present seem to rise to the occasion around him (Yvonne Kenny is the superb soprano), and so this is easily the clinching version. **Matthew Best** for Hyperion in 1993 comes pretty close, however, creating a suitably different spirit – more inward and refined, and boasting Thomas Allen in gently restrained mode with Judith Howarth on radiant form. **David Hill** on Naxos in 2009, with Christina Pier and Matthew Brook and today's superb Bach Choir in Bournemouth, is adept at everything. But going back to Boult only emphasises that this music needs a genuine sense of terror and of seeing the whites of everybody's eyes to enable the release of compassion in the listener which makes this underrated work a pinnacle of 20th-century choral music. **G**



# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

## Royal Festival Hall, London & in shops

### Carl Davis celebrates his 80th, conducting his score for the 1927 film, *Napoleon*, November 6

Carl Davis celebrated his 80th birthday on October 28. So, given he has been such a driving force behind the modern reinvention of the silent movie, this particularly celebratory event feels like a big one. It sees him conducting the Philharmonia in the first showing of a fresh, further digitally restored version of the 1927 silent film, *Napoleon*. Now, at five and a half hours in duration (broken up by three intervals) it's not for the faint hearted, but there's no question that it'll be a major cinematic and musical experience. If you can't quite face that length of time on a concert-hall seat, the event coincides with the first release by the BFI on DVD/BluRay of *Napoleon*, and also of the first-ever CD release of the entire soundtrack, performed by the Philharmonia, on the Carl Davis Collection label.

[southbankcentre.whatson/philharmonia](http://southbankcentre.whatson/philharmonia)

## Peel Hall, Salford & BBC Radio 3

The Hebrides Ensemble & Psappha

## collaborate for a joint 25th anniversary tour, November 8-12 (broadcast at a later date)

Contemporary northern classical ensembles, the Hebrides Ensemble and Psappha, celebrate their 25th birthdays this season by collaborating for the first time, bringing a specially devised programme to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Salford, Leeds and Bangor. Entitled 'Transfigured Night', it celebrates the close relationship both ensembles enjoyed with the late Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and opens with Maxwell Davies's *The Last Island* performed to a film of *The Holms of Ire islands*. The Schoenberg masterpiece after which the programme is named also features, as does a new commission from David Fennissy.

[hebridesensemble.com](http://hebridesensemble.com), [psappha.com](http://psappha.com), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas

### Vittorio Grigòlo, as Offenbach's Hoffmann, returns to Covent Garden, November 15

John Schlesinger's sumptuous production of Offenbach's popular *Les contes d'Hoffmann*

returns again to Covent Garden under the baton of Evelino Pidò, full of names you'll want to see and hear. Vittorio Grigòlo takes the title-role, Thomas Hampson sings the four villains, Sonya Yoncheva sings Antonia, Sofia Fomina sings Olympia, and Christine Rice returns as Giulietta, the role she inhabited so deliciously in the 2008 revival.

[roh.org.uk/showings](http://roh.org.uk/showings)

## Symphony Hall, Birmingham & BBC Radio 3

### Mirga Gražinytè-Tyla conducts the CBSO in Mahler, November 16, broadcast November 22

There's a lot of excitement surrounding mention of the CBSO at the moment, thanks to their new Music Director Mirga Gražinytè-Tyla. This broadcast performance of Mahler's Symphony No 1 at their Symphony Hall home will be well worth catching. The Mahler is paired with Haydn's cheerful salute to the dawn, his Symphony No 6, while the evening opens with the UK premiere of a piece from Gražinytè-Tyla's native Lithuania, the atmospheric *Fires* by Raminta Šerkšnytè.

[cbsso.co.uk](http://cbsso.co.uk), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

### A very different take on *Così fan tutte* from Aix-en-Provence might raise the odd eyebrow

#### Mozart

This *Così fan tutte* hit the headlines in the summer when the Edinburgh Festival issued a warning ahead of its transfer to the Scottish capital from Aix-en-Provence. Those likely to be offended by its 'adult themes and nudity' were given the option to return their tickets. I suspect few did, and there's a lot to be said for an 'adult' *Così* in any case. Christophe Honoré's certainly is that – and then some.

The clinical, abstract environment into which Mozart and Da Ponte place their lovers is turned by the director into Italian-occupied Ethiopia, where racial and sexual abuse – explicitly portrayed – are all-pervasive. Ferrando and Guglielmo's disguise consists of full blackface, which is less crass than it sounds given the production's serious exploration of racial tensions.

The unremitting cruelty, however, is wearing, and the additional themes cause problems. Honoré doesn't really know what to do with the work's comedic side: with the denouement, for example, or the strenuous clowning around from Sandrine



Piau's wiry-sounding Despina. The lovers are a young, convincing quartet, and Rod Gilfry's Don Alfonso the embodiment of cynicism. Louis Langrée and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra offer lively

accompaniment. Interesting, provocative and worth catching, even if it doesn't all add up. **Hugo Shirley**

Available to view for free until January 2017 at [theoperaplatform.eu](http://theoperaplatform.eu)

## ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

## Daniele Gatti guests with the Berlin Philharmonic for a programme of Dutilleux, Debussy and Honegger

## French music from Berlin

*Métaboles* has been the go-to piece for orchestras paying their own tribute to Dutilleux in his anniversary year, and understandably so: commissioned in 1959 for George Szell's Cleveland Orchestra, it's a concerto for orchestra with a full palette of colours and a thumping great happy ending. Also on the Digital Concert Hall is Sir Simon Rattle putting the BPO through their paces with *Métaboles* in 2012, and it fits his sense of orchestral theatre perfectly.

Less so Daniele Gatti. The punchy opening chords lack focus, and the conductor seems to seek an anachronistically Impressionist sensibility in the chilling nocturne for strings. There is occasionally a sense in this concert that he is conducting *with* the orchestra rather than actually leading them. The central 'Dies irae' movement of Honegger's *Liturgique* drifts listlessly, and the pounding finale runs out of energy and direction some way before the extended coda.

*La mer* also suffers from lethargic tempi under the metronome marks, requiring heavy unwritten accents to give some shape to the melodic line. The opening movement is choppy pulled about when not becalmed entirely. There are perky and



personally inflected solos from oboe and cor anglais (Dominik Wollenweber, quite superb), but the DCH does Gatti few favours: at the click of a mouse you are in the company of Karajan (1978), Abbado (2009) or Rattle (2014), who all get far more from both Debussy and the orchestra. With all three, the sense of a subtly shifting pulse is suddenly and gratifyingly present. Rattle

is perhaps the most literally accurate interpreter, Karajan at full tilt finds almost indecent sensuality, but Abbado is a more subtle rewriter of the score to make the most persuasive imaginable case for *La mer* as a veiled symphony. **Peter Quantrill**

Available via various subscription packages, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at [digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)

## Barbican, London &amp; Classic FM

## Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

## Final, November 17, broadcast November 22

Established by Donatella Flick in 1990, this major conducting competition is open to young conductors under the age of 35 from the 28 full EU member states. The winner receives a £15,000 cash prize plus, crucially, the opportunity to become Assistant Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra for up to a year. The competition begins on November 15 with a shortlist of 20 conductors, who by the November 17 final have been whittled down to just three. The final is then a public concert with the LSO, the three remaining young conductors battling it out over Verdi's *The Force of Destiny* Overture, Elgar's *Enigma* Variations, and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, in front of a jury to include Antonio Pappano and Yuri Temirkanov.

[iso.co.uk/the-2016-competition](http://iso.co.uk/the-2016-competition), [classicfm.com](http://classicfm.com)

## Barbican Hall &amp; Classic FM

## Murray Perahia and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields play Beethoven, November 21, broadcast November 29

This season the Academy of St Martin in the Fields celebrate their Principal Guest

Conductor, the renowned pianist Murray Perahia, with a complete cycle of Beethoven's piano concertos at the Barbican, directing from the keyboard. Titled 'Perahia plays Beethoven', the series runs until June 17, and this first concert features Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 3. Preceding those two is the *Creatures of Prometheus* Overture.

[asmf.org](http://asmf.org), [classicfm.com](http://classicfm.com)

## Wigmore Hall &amp; BBC Radio 3

## Truls Mørk and Håvard Gimse play Grieg and Sibelius, November 23

Norway plays a starring role in this recital of cello and piano masterworks, with two of Norway's foremost artists showcasing Grieg's Cello Sonata, Op 36, and also his Intermezzo. It's not all Norwegian fare, though, and in fact one of the draws of this programme is the variety across its late 19th century and early 20th-century gems, for joining the Grieg works are Frank Bridge's Cello Sonata, Sibelius's Four Pieces, Op 78, and Janáček's *Pohádka*.

[wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)

## Philharmonie, Berlin &amp; online

## Alan Gilbert conducts John Adams with the Berliner Philharmoniker, December 3

Alan Gilbert is celebrating the 70th birthday

of his compatriot John Adams this season by conducting Adams's works not just at his New York Philharmonic home base, but also with major orchestras around the world. So, this concert sees him in Berlin to conduct the Berlin Phil in Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, and *Lollapalooza*. It's not all Adams, though; Frank Peter Zimmermann joins Gilbert and the orchestra for Bartók's haunting Violin Concerto No 2, and then the evening concludes with a complete contrast: Tchaikovsky's powerful Symphony No 4.

[digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)

## Foyles, Charing Cross Rd, London W1

## 'Carols from King's' – the book, December 5

Gramophone's Alexandra Coghlan joins the magazine's Editor-in-Chief, James Jolly, to talk about her new BBC Books *Carols from King's* which tells the stories of some of our best-loved carols, the annual King's College, Cambridge carol service (watched by millions around the world) and how the tradition renews itself each year. Tickets for the event, which starts at 7pm, cost £5 and include a glass of mulled cider. Copies of the book will also be available to purchase on the night.

[foyles.co.uk/events](http://foyles.co.uk/events)

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**Andrew Everard,**  
Audio Editor

## NOVEMBER TEST DISCS



Dramatic and detailed, this Pentatone set of French music from the Suisse Romande Orchestre under Kazuki Yamada, is of demonstration-class.



Captured with startling clarity by Aliud, this programme of recorder pieces played by Ronald Moelker has wonderful presence and simplicity.

## The return of a classic

One of the most celebrated turntable designs is back - at a price. It's one of this month's new hi-fi arrivals



**E**vidence, if it was needed, of the scale of the 'vinyl revival' comes in the form of the classic Technics turntable, now in its re-invented SL-1200G form ①. Having launched the direct-drive model in SL-1200GAE limited-edition form and seen the whole allocation sell out straightaway, the company is making good on its promise to make its latest turntable a core part of its new hi-fi range, where it joins models such as the Ottawa SU-C550 (reviewed on page 118).

The £2799 turntable features a complete redesign, from the all-new motor built for solid pitch stability to the vibration-damping construction of the main plinth and tonearm. The company claims the new model even surpasses its SP-10Mk2, which for a while was the mainstay of many a professional broadcast studio.

Two counterweights are provided, to allow the arm to be used with a wide range of cartridges, and the SL-1200G will play at 33½, 45 and 78rpm.

Some other classics are also emerging in new forms, with Leema Acoustics launching a MkII version of its Tucana integrated amplifier ②, and Chord Electronics doing the same with its heavyweight SPM 1050 power amplifier ③. The Leema Tucana II Anniversary



Edition marks ten years since the appearance of the original model from the Welsh-based manufacturer, sells for £4995, and delivers 150W per channel into 8ohms, rising to 520W into 2ohms. An all-analogue design, it has one set of balanced inputs and six further line-ins, plus a front-panel 3.5mm input and headphone output.

Redesigned circuitboards use twice as much copper as in the old model, all the components are hand-selected, Leema's own Reference 2 cable is used for all internal wiring, and every amplifier will come with a 'passport' in which each stage of production will be signed off by the engineer responsible, and measurements given.

Kent-based Chord Electronics may have been attracting a lot of attention of late with its little Mojo portable DAC, but the £4950 SPM 1050 MkII sits at the other end of its range. Able to deliver 200Wpc into 8ohms or 350Wpc into 4ohms, in its latest MkII version it has reduced output distortion, improved capacitance for cleaner power delivery and better isolation of the mains transformer in its proprietary Ultra High Frequency power supply for less interference.

From amplifiers to speakers, and Bang & Olufsen has two new models, combining the company's characteristic sleek styling with active amplification and the ability to



be used in a wireless sound system ④. Both have built-in Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay and Google Cast streaming, and they can also stream music from computers and servers over a home network, all controlled via a smartphone/tablet app.

Each is housed in a conical aluminium shell, with a downward-firing bass unit and an acoustic lens system at the top to give 360-degree sound dispersion. The 'cap' of each speaker has touch controls, while twisting it adjusts the volume, and each speaker can be used alone or part of a wireless system of up to eight speakers. The smaller BeoSound 1 is £995, and can run on internal rechargeable batteries, while the larger BeoSound 2, at £1350, is mains-powered.

Finally this month, a brace of new network audio players from Onkyo ⑤, able to handle the highest of music resolutions: up to 192kHz/24bit PCM and DSD11.2MHz. Both the £449 NS-6130 and £699 NS-6170 use AK4490 768kHz/32-bit digital-to-analogue conversion, and offer network playback, Google Cast and AirPlay: the more expensive model uses a twin-DAC dual-differential conversion system and a twin monaural layout with separate power supply paths for each channel. In addition, a new Onkyo-designed digital filter is used to eliminate ultra-high-frequency distortion for the cleanest possible sound. ⑥

## ● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

# Marantz CD6006/PM6006

Some suggest CD players and amplifiers are out of favour but these cost-effective components serve Marantz well when it comes to sales. The latest versions are better than ever

Once, it was simple for the newcomer to hi-fi to decide which equipment to buy: a CD player (or maybe a turntable if you go back far enough), an integrated amplifier and a pair of speakers would do the job very nicely. That kind of set-up formed the cornerstone of many a student system bought with the proceeds of a summer job; it's how I started out – and yes, it was with a turntable before those newfangled silver discs were ever thought about!

**The core of the Marantz stereo offering has long been its 6000 series, the spiritual successor to classic models of the past**

Of late, however, things have changed, and I'm not just talking about the revival of the turntable. These days many a modern system is just as likely to be based around a computer. What's more, it may use powered or active speakers, or even a pair of headphones, as the means of listening.

The advocates of this new era of personal audio will tell you that not just conventional hi-fi separates but even CDs have had their day. These days you can stream a virtually limitless library of music from the internet, and in some eyes what are called 'physical media' are on their way out.

As one of the earliest adopters of CD – well, it was part of Philips at the time – Marantz has stuck to its guns when it comes to continuing to make audio-only players. Why? Simply because it believes that a device built with the single purpose of playing music from discs is the way to achieve optimal sound, and much the same thinking informs the continuation of its amplifier line.

That's true from top to bottom in its range: in recent months we've seen the arrival of the 'retro' HD-AMP1, now being joined by a matching HD-CD1 CD player. Meanwhile, on the way for the beginning of next year is the 'no holds barred' SA-10 player and PM-10 combination, designed as the company's 'new reference' range – and with pricing to match.

However, the core of the Marantz stereo offering has long been its 6000 series, the spiritual successor to classic models of the past such as the CD-63MkII and PM-66. The success of this range has enabled the company to retain European market-leadership in both CD player and amplifier categories; yes, the total size of these sectors may be much reduced, but Marantz still manages to outsell all its rivals.

The latest arrivals in the series are the CD6006 CD player and PM6006 amplifier, which sell for £399 each and are the latest versions of the 'millennial' design first launched around six years ago. Both models look very similar to the



## MARANTZ CD6006

**Type** CD player

**Price** £399

**Disc formats played** CD, CD-R/RW, MP3/WMA/AAC on CD-ROM

**USB input** AAC/MP3/WAV/WMA on memory devices; iOS compatible

**Outputs** Analogue on RCA phono, optical/coaxial digital, headphones

**Other connections** Marantz D-Bus remote control in/out

**Accessories provided** RCO03PMCD remote handset

**Finishes** Black or 'Silver Gold'

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 44x10.5x33cm

## MARANTZ PM6006

**Type** Integrated amplifier

**Price** £399

**Output power** 2x45W into 8 ohms, 2x60W into 4 ohms

**Analogue inputs** Moving magnet phono, four line-in

**Digital inputs** Two optical, one coaxial (accepting content at up to 192kHz/24bit)

**Outputs** Two pairs of speakers, line-out, headphones

**Other connections** Marantz D-Bus remote control in/out

**Accessories provided** RCO03PMCD remote handset

**Finishes** Black or 'Silver Gold'

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 44x10.5x37cm

[marantz.co.uk](http://marantz.co.uk)

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The well-matched Marantz duo forms a potent combination. Make the most of it with...

### CHORD AND QED

Decent interconnects and speaker cable will make the most of the sound: try Chord Company C-Line interconnects and QED's long-running 79-Strand speaker cable.



### BOWERS & WILKINS PM600

The PM6006 has the power and control to drive a wide range of speakers: a good starting-point would be the little 686 S2 from Bowers & Wilkins.



models they replace – last year's 6005s – but in each case the Marantz engineers have taken the opportunity to revisit and refine their designs.

In the CD player, familiar Marantz technology is readily apparent, from the symmetrical circuit layout (for optimal stereo imaging) to the reinforced chassis and the use of the company's HDAMs (Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Modules) in place of the 'chip amps' used in some rivals' designs. But the circuit layout is all new here, as is the provision of an improved HDAM-based headphone amplifier, complete with selectable gain to suit a wider range of 'phones, and the player sits on improved vibration-cancelling feet.

As well as playing discs – CD, CD-R/RW and those containing MP3/WMA/AAC files – the CD6006 offers a front-panel USB socket to allow the playback of music in AAC, MP3, WAV and WMA from memory devices. It's also 'Made for iPod/iPad' certified, meaning that iOS devices can be connected and their playback controlled via the player's display and remote handset.

The PM6006, meanwhile, is a 2x45W design and, with the exception of an additional optical input for its built-in digital-to-analogue conversion, apparently has little to set it apart from the PM6005. However, Marantz says that the digital section is now fully shielded to reduce interference, and the amplifier has been redesigned for higher peak current with improved components including a better toroidal transformer, designed for lower impedance.

Inputs run to a (rather good) moving magnet phono stage, three digital ins – although the amp lacks the USB-B 'computer audio' input now increasingly prevalent – and four line inputs. Two sets of speaker outputs are provided, with front-panel switching, and the tone controls are bypassable using a 'source direct' button.

### PERFORMANCE

There are times when simplicity pays off. The two Marantz components are extremely easy to set up and use, requiring just a connection between the player and the amplifier – you could use digital, but I'd stick to analogue – and the addition of

a pair of speakers to start playing music. A nice touch is the provision of Marantz's tried-and-tested D-Bus remote control connection between the two units, and a remote handset is provided with each unit able to control the pair.

And there's a definite air of 'nonsense' about the Marantz duo, with little in the ways of superfluous features – beyond, perhaps, the loudness button on the amplifier, which admittedly some may find useful when playing music at low levels, and which is relatively subtle in the way it lifts the bass and treble a little.

Neither is there anything much missing, apart from a USB input on the amplifier to which a computer could be connected. To get that, you'll need to look higher up the Marantz range, perhaps to the retro-styled HD-AMP1, or invest in a USB-to-S/PDIF interface, of which several are available online for not very much money.

That 45W-per-channel output from the PM6006, though competitive at this level of the market, may not seem much to some. However, it's more than adequate for the needs of most listeners, and combines with the amplifier's high-current design to make a fine job of driving speakers of reasonable sensitivity. I had excellent results with the Marantz duo connected to the little Neat Iota Alpha floorstanders, but it would also work well with more modestly priced designs such as the current iteration of the Bowers & Wilkins 685 or some of the models in the Q Acoustics range, for example.

What the Marantz combination has in abundance is an honesty of presentation, really maximising musical involvement whether with solo recitals, small ensembles or large-scale orchestral works. True, there's not quite the impact and detail more powerful and refined equipment will bring but the CD6006/PM6006 never leaves the listener thinking anything significant is missing: rather, one is more likely to be swept along with the fine insight and effortless sound here, requiring few allowances to be made for the bargain price of the components.

And a bargain this new 6006 series definitely is. Both components are designed, built and capable way

## Or you could try...

**The lower end of the stereo separates market is less competitive than it once was, with some brands abandoning this sector over the years. However, the Marantz pairing still has competition**

### Denon CD-720AE player and PM-720AE amplifier

For example from stablemate Denon with its CD-720AE player and PM-720AE amplifier, which sell for £229 apiece, or the 'Design Series' DCD-50 and PMA-50, at £329 and £449 respectively. More information at [denon.co.uk](http://denon.co.uk).



### Rotel RA-10 amplifier

Long-established budget favourite Rotel offers the very simple RA-10 amplifier at £349, or the RA-11 complete with built-in DAC at £499, with the partnering RCD-12 at £499; more on those at [rotel.com](http://rotel.com).



### Cambridge CXC CD transport

Meanwhile Cambridge uses its close cooperation with retail partner Richer Sounds to deliver value-for-money entry-level separates: the closest rivals to the Marantz models are the CXC CD transport at £300, which is designed to be used straight into the digital inputs on the CXA60 amplifier, which sells at £500. See [cambridgeaudio.com](http://cambridgeaudio.com) for more information.

beyond their modest price, and will enable newcomers and upgraders alike to build a superb-sounding system without breaking the bank.

## ● REVIEW TECHNICS OTTAVA SU-C550

# Novel technology sharpens this little unit's sound

This sleek all-in-one network audio/CD system proves it has sufficient substance to back up its not inconsiderable style

**G**iven all the hullabaloo with which Technics made its return to the audio market a couple of years back, you might be forgiven for thinking that things have all gone a bit quiet of late. Yes, the company followed up with the revival of its classic direct-drive turntables – the eye-wateringly expensive SL-1200GAE limited edition sold out very quickly – but at the time of writing the SL-12000G 'standard model' was yet to break cover.

What, though, of the hi-fi separates? Well, having put down its marker with the 'Reference Class' network pre-amp, power amp and speakers, and the more affordable 'Premium Class' C700 line-up, Technics has launched further models in a rather more understated manner. The 'Grand Class' SU-G30 network amplifier and ST-G30 music server slipped on to the market almost unnoticed by most, and the same is true of the Ottava lifestyle system, one version of which we (finally) have here.

The Ottava system certainly has style on its side. At its heart is a network amplifier/CD player, the SU-C550, with a slick glass-lidded top-loading disc mechanism, the whole thing being housed in a low-slung case elegantly finished in aluminium. Having seen the pictures, I had been expecting something rather larger than the small, relatively light box the delivery driver dropped off, but the unit is just 36cm wide and weighs 3.9kg, yet manages to feel solid and substantial in use.

The £1699 SC-C500 system combines this main unit with a pair of elegant speakers packed with innovative technologies to get a big sound from their small enclosures, which are just 11cm square and 27cm tall. Twin mid/bass drivers fire upwards and downwards into dispersion-controlling cones, with a port to tune the bass, while there's a separate tweeter for high frequencies. Meanwhile, the SU-C550 network amp/player can be bought on its own for £1199, allowing the user to combine it with their own choice of loudspeakers. It was the 'speaker-free' SU-C550 Technics chose to submit for this review.

Whichever version you choose, the amplifier has a novel technology, also used in the Technics separates systems, to tune it to the speakers with which it's used. This Load-Adaptive Phase Calibration



### TECHNICS OTTAVA SU-C550

**Type** CD/network audio system

**Price** £1199 (£1699 with matching speakers)

**Power output** 20Wpc into 8 ohms; 40Wpc into 4 ohms

**Networking** Ethernet/Wi-Fi

**Inputs** USB-A on front panel, USB-B for computer connection, optical digital, Bluetooth, AirPlay

**Outputs** One pair of speakers, headphones on 3.5mm socket

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 36x91x25.8cm

[technics.com/uk](http://technics.com/uk)

needs no extra equipment: instead the amplifier sends a test signal to the speakers, then analyses the amplitude phase characteristics, and uses its internal digital signal processing to adjust accordingly, aiming for a flat frequency response.

**Provided you don't push it too hard, you'll find the Technics' smooth, rich balance very enjoyable**

Apart from its disc transport, which can play both CDs and CD-R/RW discs (but only with CD files), the SU-C550 has a USB-A socket on the front for iOS devices and USB memory, a USB-B to the rear to which a computer can be connected, and a single optical digital input. Files at up to 192kHz/24bit and DSD5.6 can be handled via the USB (not from iOS) and over wired networking, while the optical digital input is limited to 96kHz/24bit. There are no analogue inputs.

DLNA networking is possible either using wired Ethernet or Wi-Fi, the unit coming with two stub aerials, and there's also both Bluetooth and AirPlay connectivity, while the Technics also offers vTuner Internet Radio and Spotify Connect. Control is via the front-panel OLED touchscreen or the remote handset supplied, while the SU-C550 can also be

'driven' using a dedicated Technics app, available for iOS and Android devices, or you can use a networked computer with the company's desktop player.

### PERFORMANCE

The Technics isn't massively powerful, delivering 20W per channel into 8 ohms and 40Wpc into 4 ohms, but it proves capable of driving most modern speakers of reasonable sensitivity both cleanly and convincingly – at least provided you're not expecting room-shaking volume levels or have a very large room. In most reasonably sized spaces it has more than enough power to deliver 'interesting' levels while still having plenty in reserve for the dynamics of music.

It's interesting to hear the effect of that LAPC system, which can be bypassed once set up for instant comparisons: across a number of speakers, I found that running LAPC gave a small but worthwhile gain in 'snap' and focus, instantly apparent from the slight softness in evidence when the system was defeated. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that, without LAPC, the Technics sounds rather anonymous and ordinary; with it in use, it has a much more convincing sound.

As mentioned, the Technics does have its limits, but provided you don't want or need to push it too hard, it's likely you'll find its smooth, rich balance very enjoyable across a wide range of musical styles. Whether playing CDs or receiving high-resolution DSD files from the computer via the USB input, the SU-C550 has an even-handed balance, delivering a rich bass without swamping details in a wash of bloom, and bringing out vocal and instrumental timbres without ever straying into brightness or forwardness.

It's 'easy listening' in the best possible sense, allowing the music to wash into the room in a manner designed to relax the listener and let them concentrate on what's being played, not how it's being reproduced. True, some of the niceties of space and focus are softened – this isn't the system for those wanting pinpoint imaging – but the broad, deep sound stage on offer, and the solidity of the sonic picture painted, are highly attractive.

This is a stylish, accomplished system – and one well tuned to the requirements of its target market. **G**

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## ESSAY

## A streaming player so simple...

There's no shortage of very good network players out there these days, so who in their right mind would consider building their own? Well, when it's this easy, why not?

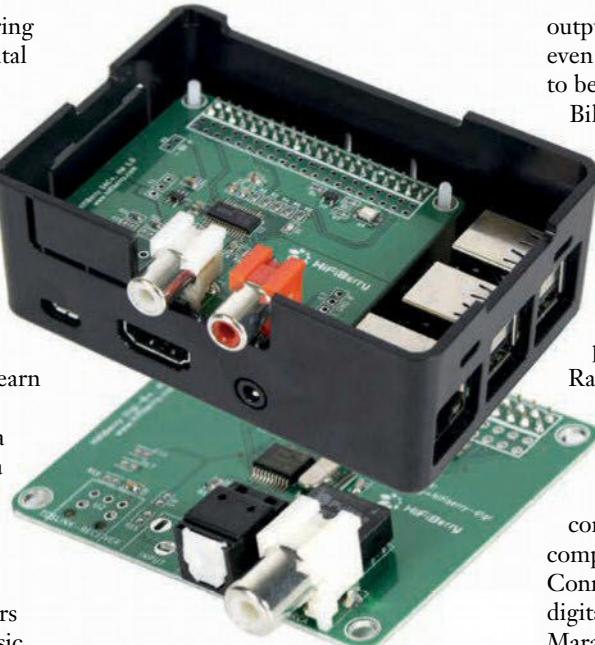
**H**i-fi used to be all about tinkering and experimentation, but digital killed all that,' said a friend recently, referring to his recent re-acquaintance with playing LPs. From his newfound viewpoint he regards me with some kind of disdain, deeply entrenched as I am in high-resolution downloads, servers and networking. Even the fact that I do still have a turntable, and have been known to spin the odd big black disc from time to time, isn't enough to earn my redemption.

'You're like those people who spend a fortune on a sports car and have no idea what's going on under the bonnet,' was one of his more withering aspersions, during one of his reveries about being elbow-deep in bearing-oil and drive-belt talc, alignment protractors and tracking force scales. I just play music, apparently – there's no love, no soul. Except... I've probably spent more time of late experimenting, fettling and working on my system than I have for a very long time, inspired by some of the things I reported in last month's Audio Essay, and a few ideas I'd been meaning to try for a while.

**It will index and organise your music collection, integrate Tidal and internet radio, and even run on a music server**

Regular readers will know that my digital set-up is already fairly well optimised, using an inexpensive fibre-optic network link between my music storage server and my player, purely to exclude electrical noise from the former from reaching the latter. That worked very well when I put it in place a while back now, and reports back from readers who have tried the same thing have been encouraging.

I also run a MacMini computer dedicated to music playback, mainly used for reviewing the growing numbers of products with USB inputs for playing music from a computer. It was an inexpensive online buy, being some years old now, but has been improved with the addition of extra RAM capacity, a solid-state drive in place of its old 'spinning disk' hard drive, and everything not involved in playing music turned off.



A gift for the hi-fi tinkerer – make your own streaming solution at home

Simplifying the computer down so much got me thinking about the Raspberry Pi computer with which my wife – who 'does computers' for a living – tinkers from time to time, and so I did some online searching to see what I could do to try it for music. At which point I discovered Swiss-based HiFiBerry, which makes a range of products designed to do just that, and decided to give it a go.

How difficult was it? Not much trickier than a few clicks on a couple of websites to order the components, followed by a process beside which assembling one of those toddlers' 'big bricks' Lego toys would rank aside the achievements of Brunel. The Raspberry Pi board arrived, along with its plug-in power supply, while a second package brought the HiFiBerry audio board and a flat-packed, slot-together case for the whole enterprise, which is about the size of two packs of cards stacked together.

Which is actually what the cards do: the HiFiBerry card just plugs into the main Raspberry Pi computer board, and comes complete with little screw-in spacer legs to hold the two together. I was using the HiFiBerry Digi+ board, which provides optical and coaxial digital outputs, but there's also a version with a built-in digital-to-analogue converter and analogue

outputs to connect to your amplifier. Or even one with an amplifier built-in, ready to be used straight into speakers.

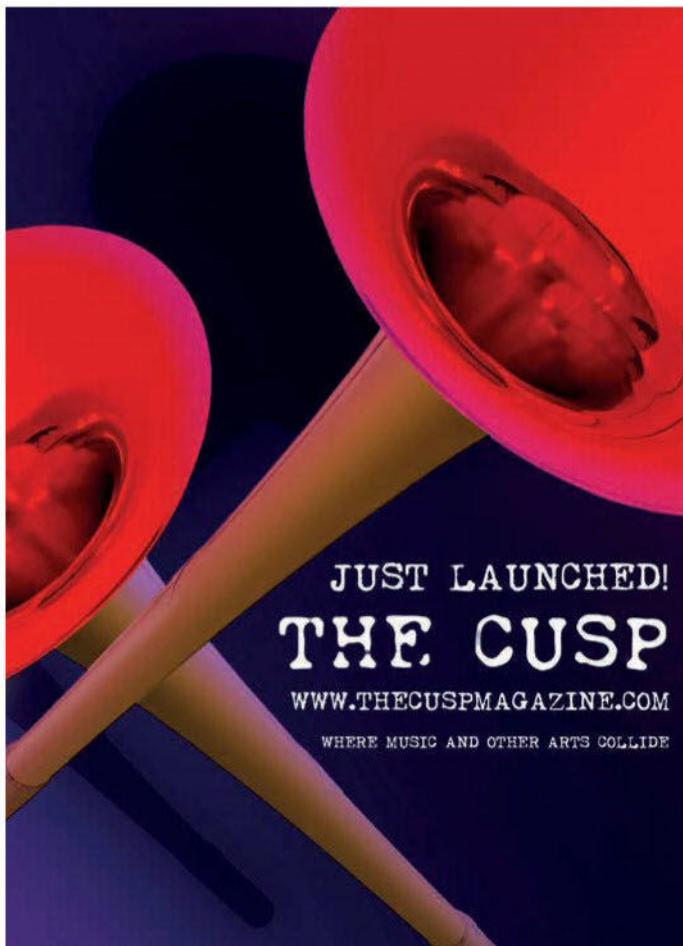
Bill of parts so far? About £30 for the main computer board, from £23 for the Digi+ board – the DAC board is about a fiver more – and £10 for the snap-together case. And that's about it: you could use a mobile phone charger with a MicroUSB plug on the end of the cable to provide the power, or the official Raspberry Pi adapter at about £6, or, as I did, a linear power supply bought online for about £8.

Altogether anywhere from £70 to £100 for a complete digital source, controllable remotely using a home computer or even a smartphone or tablet. Connect it to an inexpensive DAC or the digital input on an amplifier such as the Marantz PM6006 reviewed on page 116, connect it to your home network via wired Ethernet or Wi-Fi (which are built into the latest Raspberry Pi, along with Bluetooth), and you're done.

Yes, you will need software to run it, using a little MicroSD card you write using your computer and then insert into the Raspberry Pi, but HiFiBerry has that covered, too, via a free Roon 'image' you can download and run on the little computer. The only downside is the cost of Roon itself, which is about £90 a year or £375 for a lifetime membership – but then, as you may have read in these pages recently, Roon is very good indeed, both for sound quality and convenience, and offers a free 14-day trial. Other music player packages are available for the Raspberry Pi and easily found online; none I have tried to date is as slick and enjoyable to use. The Roon image simply works, with no computer knowledge.

**It will index and organise your music collection, integrate Tidal and internet radio, and even run on a music server to deliver any Roon clients you may have around the house. In my set-up it runs on a USB memory stick plugged into my main NAS unit, and I'm already thinking of adding more Raspberry Pi/HiFiBerry combinations around the house to connect to various systems.**

Who said the age of hi-fi tinkering was dead? 



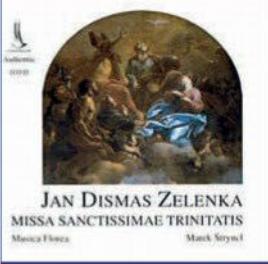
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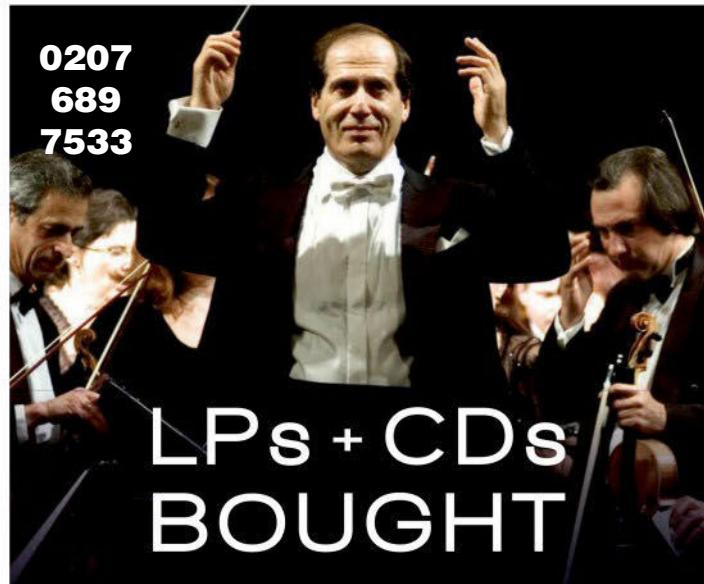
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# NOTES & LETTERS

Adrian Boult's *Gerontius* · José Carreras – the ideal tenor? · Snobbery in classical music

*Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com*

## Unseen Boult footage?

Not least of the pleasures of having Sir Adrian Boult's 1968 BBC Canterbury Cathedral performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* back in circulation on DVD [ICA Classics – to be reviewed next month] is being able to see again Ron Isted's 1989 documentary, *ACB*, celebrating Boult's centenary.

In that documentary are extracts from previously televised concerts. Particularly exciting is a performance clip of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*, which formed part of a concert originally broadcast in January 1964 from Croydon's Fairfield Halls with the Philharmonia Orchestra on top form, and Sir Adrian conducting with a passion and energy that is totally gripping. In the same concert were Malcolm Arnold's *Tam O'Shanter* Overture and the Schumann Cello Concerto played by János Starker.

Other extracts – of the March from Bliss's music for the film *Things to Come*, Holst's *The Perfect Fool* ballet music, and Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony – come from two programmes of English music, broadcast in April and August 1970, with the LPO in which Sir Adrian also talked to Richard Baker – very interestingly, as I recall, Elgar's *Cockaigne* Overture, Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* and Vaughan Williams's *Norfolk Rhapsody* were also in the original programmes.

Here is material, if it is still available in its original form, that I think could make further interesting and invaluable DVDs showing Sir Adrian at work.

*Garry Humphreys  
London N13*

## The best *Don Carlo*

It was most interesting to read Mark Pullinger and Hugo Shirley's discussion of Giulini's 1971 recording of *Don Carlo* (October, page 106), which I think is Verdi's most interesting and challenging work. I would agree with them – that this particular recording is overrated.

The better alternative available recordings were reviewed by the two gentlemen. And I fully agree that the live 1958 Covent Garden recording by Giulini (ROH Heritage, 12/06) is indeed much better, and that the Santini 1961 (DG, 10/62) is probably overall the best recorded. Santini also recorded

## Letter of the Month

### Singing José Carreras's praises

I refer to Richard Fairman's Icons feature (Awards, page 78). In the early 1970s, I became a lifelong opera lover through hearing the singing of José Carreras. For countless music lovers, Carreras is a great singer and worthy of his standing in the pantheon of the greatest singers of the 20th century. His artistry is unique; his poetic phrasing, his smooth *legato* and his endless breath control are truly remarkable.

The ideal Verdi tenor requires elegance and passion, and this describes Carreras's singing perfectly. On the stage his 'élan and psychological approach' to roles such as Don Carlo and Stiffelio stands alone. In the more romantic roles of Puccini, he wisely allows his 'natural presence' to speak for him, while in Bizet's *Carmen*, his Don José is a masterclass in operatic acting, as he transitions from an innocent soldier in Act 1,



Carreras: quintessential tenor and Karajan favourite

to a confused lover in Act 2, to a broken and desperate man in the finale.

Speaking for myself and millions of others, José Carreras is the quintessential tenor. Karajan thought so too, and he only ever worked with the best of the best.

*Rev Philip Smith  
Ramsey, Isle of Man*

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an earlier version in 1954 with Gobbi as Posa and Christoff as the king, which is also very good (EMI, 11/55).

For sheer excitement, I am drawn to another recording, and that is the live one of 1970 at the Vienna State Opera with Corelli, Janowitz, Verret and Waechter all in fine form, conducted by Horst Stein.

Overall, we are rather lucky with the available recordings of this masterpiece.

*Andrew Vincenti, via email*

## Incomplete Virgil Thomson

Philip Kennicott's review of 'The Complete Songs of Virgil Thomson for Voice and Piano' (Awards, page 106) was welcome both for his fair evaluation of the performances and for his honest ambivalence about Thomson's music. Let me point out, however, that, despite the set's title, two major works are absent: the setting of Gertrude Stein's 'Capital, Capitals' (1927) for four solo male voices

with piano, and the *Four Songs to Poems of Thomas Campion* (1951), for voice with piano (or clarinet, viola and harp). Also, any full assessment of Thomson's compositions for solo voice should ideally include such works as *The Feast of Love* (1954) for baritone and orchestra, and the *Stabat mater* (1931) for female voice and string quartet, the latter an (atypically) emotionally intense setting not of the traditional Latin text but of a French-language poem by Max Jacob.

Finally, I must add that the one real weakness of the New World Records set is the frustratingly error-ridden French. To attempt to prepare 50 minutes' worth of tricky French-text songs when – judging from the frequency and nature of the mistakes in pronunciation – none of the singers is fluent in the language was surely more foolhardy than brave. My hunch is that whatever coaching was done was too little, too late. Perhaps the only

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realistic solution is for some Francophone artists to do a single disc of Thomson's French-language songs, preferably with the *Stabat mater*.

*Nicholas Deutsch  
Cambridge, MA, USA*

## Embracing eclecticism

Cliff Millward (Letters, October, page 129, in reply to Laurence Dooley, Letters, Awards, page 148) rightly laments the fact that many fans of classical music are viewed as snobs; but the problem is that some of them really are. Mr Dooley takes John Wilson to task for daring to suggest that Cole Porter is as accomplished a craftsman as Brahms or Wagner; but John Wilson is a fine and painstaking craftsman himself, and his thoughts are well worth listening to. I speak as one who has made the commitment to *Tristan*, having sat through



Tuning up: the multi-talented pianist Daniil Trifonov

## OBITUARY

A busy London orchestral player who was principal oboe of the ECO

### NEIL BLACK

*Oboist  
Born May 28, 1932  
Died August 14, 2016*



Neil Black, who has died aged 84, was a fixture on the London chamber-ensemble scene for the bulk of his musical career. He studied the oboe at Rugby and was one of the first players in the newly formed National Youth Orchestra. At Oxford he read Law, which he soon abandoned for History, but music drew him to Jack Westrup's university opera productions, and on coming down he took up the oboe again, studying with Terence MacDonagh, principal oboe in Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1958 he became principal oboe of the London Philharmonic, but was soon playing with the Philomusica of

it (not to mention two complete *Ring* cycles) at ENO in my twenties. These days I'm happy to be as eclectic as the next man; but it may be that there is nevertheless a line to be drawn, as I realised from an email I received recently from Amazon, recommending CDs of choral music. One of the recordings it singled out was of Haydn's *The Creation*, apparently featuring George Michael. In the short time it took me to realise that they meant Michael George, I reflected that there are perhaps, after all, some boundaries which are better left uncrossed.

*Ian Duncalf  
High Wycombe, Bucks*

## Chameleon piano tuner

I refer to the picture [left] in Recording of the Month (October, page 35) of a pianist who is obviously tuning the piano.

Is this definitely a picture of Daniil Trifonov (now wearing glasses)? If so, he has undoubtedly hidden talents if he can tune it as well as play it so well (I believe Michelangeli was said to be similarly skilled although I doubt he tuned it in public view)?

*John Greenaway, via email*

*DG writes: 'Daniil hasn't tuned it himself. The picture was taken whilst the piano was being tuned – by the tuner.' And yes, we agree that Trifonov can look very different from picture to picture! - Ed*

## NEXT MONTH

# DECEMBER 2016



## Sound out the trumpet for Christmas!

With her new album 'Jubilo', Alison Balsom is celebrating the versatility of her instrument in all its glory, she tells Sarah Kirkup

## Critics' Choice

Stuck for present ideas? Looking for inspiration? Why not take the advice of our expert reviewers, who each choose their favourite recording from 2016

## Epiphany music from Clare College

As the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge continue their recording journey through the church year, Editor Martin Cullingford meets their engaging conductor Graham Ross

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Various Cprs The Counterenor. *Jacobs.* (S) (B) ACC24321

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Pauset Geograph. *Voix humaines. Conc L. Dornröschen.*

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ALBION *albionrecords.org*

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Rovetta Messe pour la Naissance de Louis XIV. *Galilei Consort/Chérnier.* (F) ALPHA965

Schubert Stg Qt No 14. *Kopatchinskaja/St Paul CO.* (F) ALPHA265

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Various Cprs Vc Stories. *Cocset/Basses Réunies.* (M) (B) ALPHA890

Various Cprs Splendeurs de Versailles. *Various artists.* (S) (B) ALPHA260

ALTO *altocd.com*

Balakirev Sym No 1. *Russia. Tamara (r1974/78). USSR St SO/Svetlanov.* (S) (B) ALC1331

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Grieg Lyric Pieces (r1986/88). *Pletnev.* (S) (B) ALC1330

Lumbye Strauss of Scandinavia (r1989-93). *Odense SO/Guth.* (S) (B) ALC1333

Mozart Pf Concs Nos 8, 23 & 24 (r1961/62). *Kempff/Bamberg SO/BPO/Leitner.* (S) (B) ALC1323

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Various Cprs Our Christmas Sequence (r1992). *St Paul's Cath Ch/Scott.* (S) (B) ALC1325

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APR *aprrecordings.co.uk*

Various Cprs Cpte Electrola & DIG Recs (r1938-58). *Then-Bergh.* (B) (B) APR6021

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<b>Moszkowski</b>	Violin Sonata			
Aus aller Herren Länder, Op 23	<b>Prokofiev</b>			
<b>36</b>	Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 10; No 3, Op 26; No 4, Op 53			
Fackeltanz, Op 51	Symphonies – No 4 (revised version, 1947), Op 112; No 7, Op 131			
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Gondoliera, Op 41 (orch Otto Langely)	(two versions of finale)			
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Six Airs de ballet, Op 56				
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Spanische Tänze, Op 12 (orch Philipp Scharwenka & Valentin Frank)				
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# Nik Kershaw

The singer-songwriter on his early listening habits, the pros and cons of streaming music, and working with the London Philharmonic

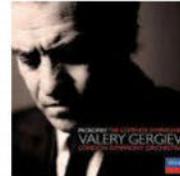
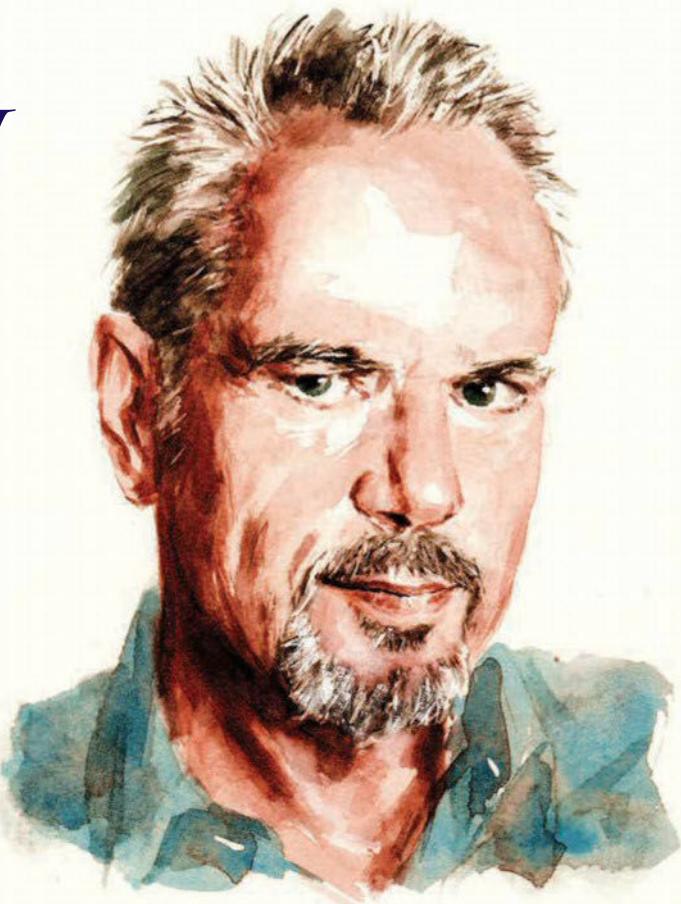
**My dad was** an architect but he would have rather run away to join the circus. He played the flute in local orchestras in Ipswich, Suffolk, where I was brought up, and in the orchestra for a G&S Society. My mum was trained as an opera singer but she ended up having kids and never fulfilled that dream. She would sing a lot of Lieder, though, both around the house and at singing festivals; she'd do her bit and the judges would pull her to pieces. It was like *The X Factor* for opera singers – I can't believe she put herself through it.

**Early on,** the only way we could play records was on a mono radiogram; I remember hearing Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. Then we graduated to a stereo which we bought in Boots. The music we played was like a 'greatest hits' classical compilation – there was Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, Beethoven's *Pastoral*, Holst's *The Planets*, Sibelius Second, Elgar's *Enigma Variations*... I didn't do Music O level but my brother did, and he'd bring home pieces to study; my favourite, and one which I still play regularly, was Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. I loved his *Sea Symphony*, too, and I was drawn to other early-20th-century composers like Prokofiev. I like a melody that takes you on a harmonic adventure.

**I started learning** the violin at grammar school but then my teacher, who I fancied, left. So I didn't play anything else until I became interested in guitars. I got into Bowie, T Rex, then heavy metal, and then I discovered jazz fusion and prog rock; Emerson Lake and Palmer's Mussorgsky was a bit cheesy but I really went for that. My first efforts at writing music were all a bit 'proggy' – I don't think I stayed in the same time signature for more than a couple of minutes.

**Having not studied** the rudiments of music theory, I can't read music all that well, but in pop music you can get away with it – it's all computer magic anyway. Nowadays, I'm dipping my toe in production music; I do work for a company that makes music for TV, so I'm finding myself in Abbey Road with the London Philharmonic. I'll demo a piece with fake strings on the computer, and then get to hear the real thing.

**The interesting thing** now is that I'll sit down and start writing a melody, thinking, 'I really should be making another album,' and then I'll think, 'What am I writing? Is it a pop song, or is it classical?' But does it have to be one or the other? Most pop musicians would say they want to write something classical. It's a pompous thing to say really – it's just a way of trying to look more credible than you are. So I'm not going to say I want to write my first symphony – when you listen to the complexity of, say, Prokofiev, you realise what a different league these composers are in.



## THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

**Prokofiev** Symphony No 1, 'Classical'  
London Symphony Orchestra / Valery Gergiev  
Decca (6/06)

This may not be Prokofiev's most cerebral piece, but I find it uplifting and it makes me smile.

**Young people** can sample everything online these days – it's all there, there's no distinction between classical and pop. And that's a good thing; I remember going into classical music shops and finding them quite intimidating. But I rarely listen – *properly* listen – to music. I tend to think that if I'm sitting down and working, I should be *making* music, not listening to it, which is stupid really; you need that source material inside you before anything can come out. But when I get to the studio first thing in the morning, I'll have a cup of coffee, fire up iTunes or Spotify, and see where it takes me.

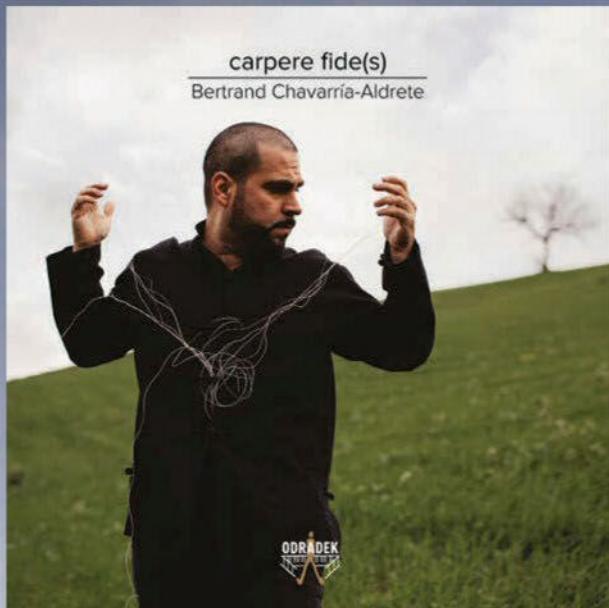
**The problem with** streaming, though, is that, long term, there will be fewer professional musicians and composers. You can't put the toothpaste back in the tube, but the fact is that people today consume music in a different way. And I don't have a problem with that. But there are major corporations earning money and it's not getting back to the songwriters, and *that's* what I have a problem with.

**But yes, most** of my listening is done online. I buy downloads and even own a couple that are studio quality, but really it's being in my studio with quality speakers that makes the biggest difference. Ultimately, though, it doesn't matter how you listen to music. Even on crackly old vinyl, on poor-quality MP3s, it's the music itself that's important. **6**  
For details of Nik Kershaw's future concerts, visit [nikkershaw.net](http://nikkershaw.net)

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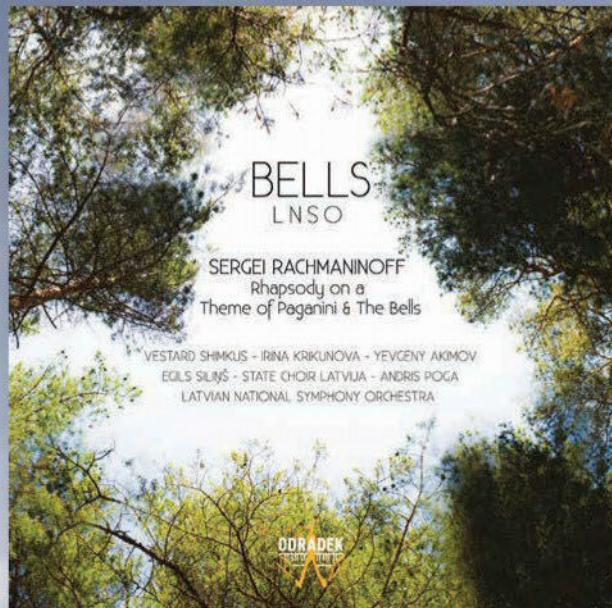
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In *carpere fide(s)*, acclaimed guitarist Bertrand Chavarria-Aldrete presents contemporary Spanish guitar music in all its diverse and vibrant colours.



Marvel at the way in which the guitar-writing of Flamenco music is transformed into a modern guise in Gabriel Erkoreka's *Fantasia*, or how Alberto Hortigüela's *Tres tientos de Antonio de Cabezón* explore the wonderful music of that Renaissance composer. *Carpere fide(s)* also features Elena Mendoza's *Breviario de espejismos*, reflecting *Los Caprichos* by Goya, and the archetypes of guitar writing are distorted to fascinating effect in *Ezkil* by Ramon Lazcano, the composer featured in SMASH ensemble's album *Chalk Laboratory* also on Odradek.

In *The Bells*, Rachmaninoff, the LNSO and State Choir Latvija take us on a journey through the milestones of life in music of exceptional beauty.



Rachmaninoff composed *The Bells* to poetry by Edgar Allan Poe – which chimed with his own love of Russian church bells. His intoxicating *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* features Latvian pianist Vestard Shimkus, described as “a phenomenon” (Paavo Järvi) and “one of the most remarkable pianists of the young generation” (Piano News). *Bells* marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra in 2016, while the outstanding State Choir Latvija celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017.

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